



The Original PROSPER Research Project

The first phase of the federally-funded research project that evaluated the PROSPER Partnership Model began in late 2001 and had two primary aims. The first aim was to evaluate the efficacy of a community-based partnership approach to selecting, implementing, and sustaining evidence-based prevention programming for youth and families. The second was to learn what factors are most important in partnership effectiveness, particularly the effectiveness of program implementation, which includes program recruitment.

Background

The goal of the original PROSPER project was to demonstrate the feasibility and outcomes of a model for diffusing evidence-based programs into communities through the use of university-school-community partnerships. Interventions were specifically aimed at middle school-aged youth and their families, with an emphasis on building youth competencies, improving family functioning, and preventing conduct problems, particularly substance use.

PROSPER developed out of previous research on large-scale implementation of evidence-based programs including Project Family, Capable Families and Youth Project, FAST Track Project, and Communities that Care. Project Family and the Capable Families and Youth Project originated at Iowa State University and provided an earlier-generation community-university partnership model design. The FAST Track Project and Communities that Care evaluation were completed at Penn State (See Spoth, Greenberg, Bierman, & Redmond, 2004).

The initial phase of PROSPER was funded by a grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). The grant covered the costs of the complex research design and data collection, management, and analysis protocols. In addition, all aspects of program implementation were fully funded for two years, with reduced funding in subsequent years to evaluate the success of local sustainability efforts in communities.

Research Model

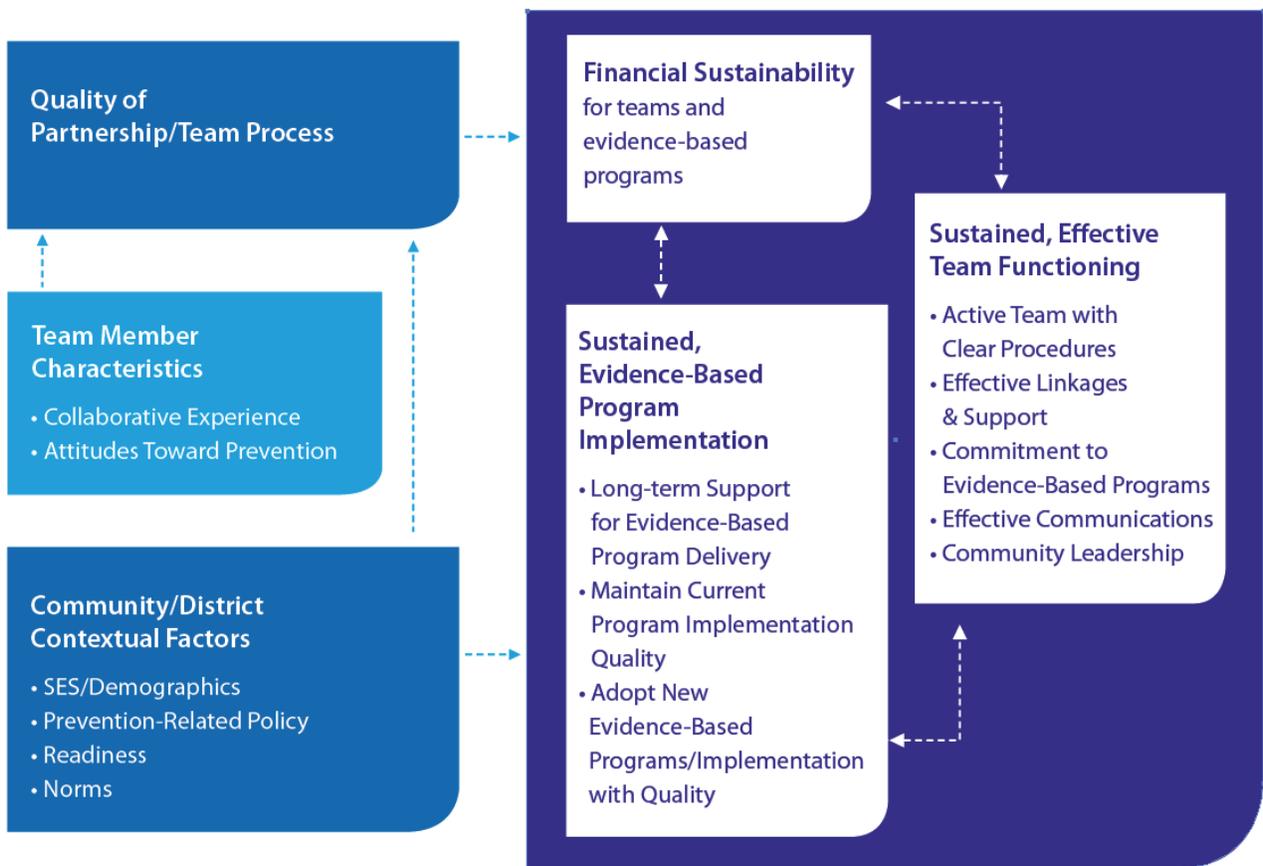
The PROSPER Process-to-Outcome Model (Spoth & Greenberg, 2005) has two primary sub-models describing the partnership process and the intervention-outcome process. Moreover, the model

P R O S P E R Project Summary

incorporates contextual influences at the levels of the family, school, and broader community. The PROSPER community teams are conceptualized as moving through a developmental process, through organizational, initial and ongoing operations, and sustainability phases.

PROSPER staff adopted the definition of sustainability recommended by Johnson (Johnson et al., 2004), who wrote “...sustainability is the process of ensuring an adaptive prevention system and a sustainable innovation integrated into ongoing operations to benefit diverse stakeholders.” In the PROSPER Process-to-Outcome model (below) we consider two central components of sustainability.

Across the phases, it was anticipated that the quality of team functioning (e.g., task orientation, culture, leadership, and quality of communication) would be associated with various indices of successful team outcomes (e.g., intervention goal accomplishment). Results from large randomized control trials have supported this model.



Source: Partnership Model for Diffusion of Proven Prevention (2007). R. Spoth and M. Greenberg (PIs), C. Redmond and M. Feinberg (Co-PIs), C. Shin, S. Clair, J Stout, J. Welsh, and M. Small

P R O S P E R P r o j e c t S u m m a r y

The first component concerns team processes and functioning: *Sustained, Effective Team Functioning*. This type of sustainability is evidenced by (1) an active team of key individuals that represent Extension, the school district, community agencies and institutions, parents and youth and other stakeholders; (2) clear administrative procedures for team functioning, including entry and exit of members; (3) strong institutional, political, and financial connections and support in the community; (4) maintenance of commitment to implementation of evidence-based programs; (5) expansion of evidence-based program menu based on community input; (6) articulating the value of these programs in terms relevant to the goals of multiple stakeholders; and (7) a growing role in community leadership regarding preventive interventions for youth and families.

The second component regards the evidence-based programs for youth and families: *Sustained, Evidence-Based Program Implementation*. This includes (1) acquiring long-term support for continuation of programming (both family and school-based); (2) maintaining implementation quality of current programs; and (3) engaging community members in the high quality implementation of additional programs. Both sets of criteria are, in part, the result of gaining substantial and consistent financial support from the local community. We conceptualize these two domains as transactional, iterative, ongoing processes that require continuous assessment and evaluation.

Research Activities

Approximately 11,000 middle school-aged youth and their families participated in the PROSPER research project. These participants were from 28 communities of up to 50,000 in population in Iowa and Pennsylvania (based on data from the U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000). Participating youth were in two sequential cohorts. One-half of the communities (and corresponding school districts) were randomly assigned to receive PROSPER prevention programming, while the remaining communities were assigned to a wait-list control group.

Once teams were formed in each of the experimental communities, their first task was to select an extracurricular, family-focused preventive program targeted at sixth grade students and their families. Teams chose from a menu of three evidence-based programs: Preparing for the Drug Free Years, Strengthening Families Program: 10-14 (SFP 10-14), and the Adolescent Transitions Program. Teams chose a program based on appropriateness to community needs. All teams chose to implement

P R O S P E R Project Summary

SFP 10-14, which requires the use of trained facilitators; the next task of each community team was to recruit individuals qualified to become facilitators. The University-based research team arranged for the recruited individuals to be trained by official SFP 10-14 program trainers.

After choosing SFP 10-14 and training facilitators, the teams next began recruiting families to participate in the spring 2003 session of SFP 10-14. Although teams chose different methods to recruit families, common approaches included media campaigns, short recruitment sessions, and the use of incentives (See Spoth, Clair, Greenberg, Redmond and Shin, 2008). Most teams worked closely with schools on their recruitment efforts. In the spring of 2003, while in sixth grade, Cohort 1 received SFP 10-14. Approximately 20 percent of eligible families were successfully recruited to participate, and over 17 percent attended at least one session.

The following year, teams were presented with three options for the school-based program. These options included LifeSkills Training, Project Alert, and All Stars. Schools were responsible for implementing these programs as part of their regular curriculum; therefore, school personnel made the final program determination. There was more diversity in the school-based program selections than the family-based program selections, with all three school-based programs utilized by PROSPER communities.

In the fall semester of 2003, the school-based programs were implemented for Cohort 1, then in the seventh grade. Although the school-based evidence-based programs were taught primarily by teachers, there were some in which instructors were non-teachers. The results from several studies indicate that teachers generally outperform non-teachers on program implementation, suggesting that teachers should be encouraged to implement the evidence-based programs. This same sequence of extracurricular, family-focused programming followed by an in-school prevention curriculum was repeated with Cohort 2 one year after Cohort 1 (in 2003-04 and 2004-05, respectively). Both cohorts received whatever booster sessions the programs provided, although not all communities fully implemented boosters.

The grant provided the intervention communities with full funding for two successive years of implementing a family program (Years 2 and 3) and a school program (Years 3 and 4). In spite of the

great number of tasks and the learning demands on the teams and their leaders at the beginning of the project, discussion and planning for sustainability was included as a topic at almost every learning community and at statewide workshops.

Results from implementation quality observers showed high levels of adherence to evidence-based programs (See Spoth, Guyll, Lillehoj, Redmond & Greenberg, 2007).

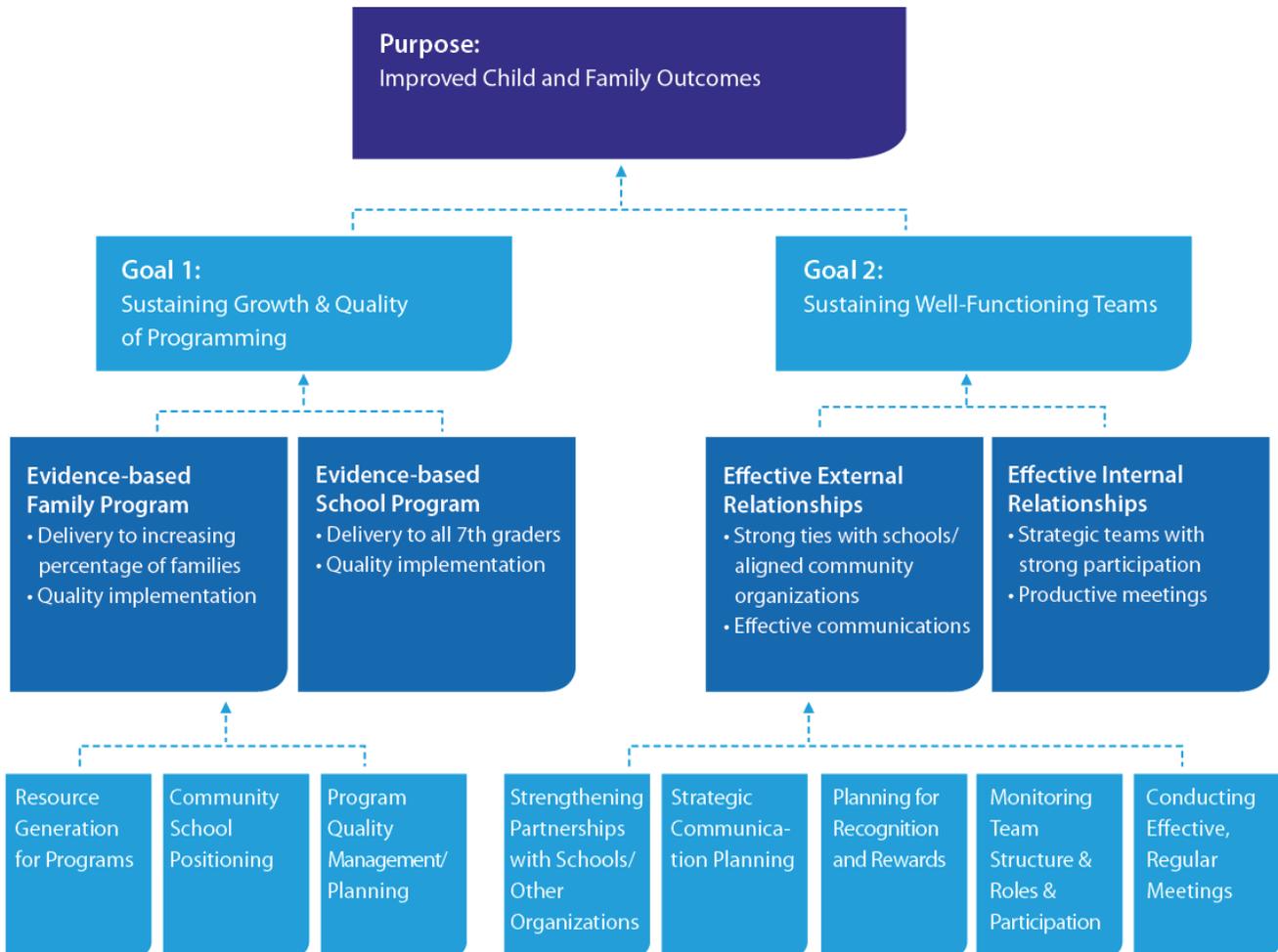
Bridge toward Sustainability and Sustainability Practice Model

The early sustainability phase in Year 3 was conceptualized as a bridge toward sustainability. Sustainability was regarded primarily as a process and less as an outcome. During this early phase, Team Leaders continued to receive salary support and technical assistance through the PROSPER grant. However, their role began to change, emphasizing these three goals: (1) further development and sustainability of the community teams, (2) program sustainability efforts, and (3) further leadership development and enhancement of their knowledge base of prevention science. By the end of Year 3 it was necessary for teams to actively solicit local funds to continue implementation of the family program and, by the end of Year 4, to support continuation of the school program. Community teams were asked to secure funds to cover the following costs: facilitator, local arranger to oversee coordination of program details, child care wages, meals, family and youth incentives, costs associated with family recruitment (mailings, copying, etc.) for which there were incentives offered in Year 4 (e.g., project “matching” funds to pay for a second family-focused intervention group after local funds were secured for a first group). By sustaining programming, teams were strengthened and perceived by their communities as providing a valued, ongoing, high-quality prevention product. The conceptual model displayed on the opposite page has been used to guide technical assistance provided to teams from Year 4 forward.

The Objectives in this sustainability model are outlined briefly to indicate the types of activities that are required to achieve the goal. The strategies to meet these objectives include:

- *Resource Generation for Programs:* Generating financial, in-kind, and volunteer support to maintain both the family- and school-based programs and to increase the program offerings as time goes on.

PROSPER Project Summary



- *Community/School Positioning*: Ensuring that the PROSPER team and programs are viewed positively in the community and that the school and community as a whole recognize how the team contributes to the betterment of youth and families.
- *Program Quality Management/Planning*: This strategy includes all the steps required to monitor programs for quality implementation, including securing observers, scheduling observations, collecting data, providing feedback, etc.
- *Strengthening Partnerships with Schools/Other Organizations*: This strategy includes team activities that create an interdependent relationship among the team, the school, and community groups whereby PROSPER activities and programs serve to meet mutually beneficial goals.

P R O S P E R Project Summary

- *Strategic Communication Planning:* Teams that have developed communication plans have enjoyed more success in generating awareness for PROSPER activities, financial support for programs, and participation in the family-based program.
- *Planning for Recognition and Rewards:* This is an important step to sustain interest in and support for PROSPER team activities and programs. Rewards and recognitions can include team members, program participants, and supporters from the school and community.
- *Monitoring Team Structure, Roles, and Participation:* To ensure that the team continues to perform effectively and that team members remain enthusiastic about PROSPER efforts, Team Leaders and Prevention Coordinators need to spend time thinking about the team's current levels of functioning. Together with the team, the Team Leader and Prevention Coordinator should develop a continuous improvement plan that addresses all of the strategies in the sustainability model as appropriate.
- *Conducting Effective, Regular Meetings:* The team is integral to the sustainability of programs. It is imperative that regular meetings are conducted and that their effectiveness is discussed as part of a continuous improvement plan.

Prevention Coordinators have supported the Community Teams and Team Leaders in seeking and securing funding to sustain evidence-based programs. This has included the development of local communication plans and campaigns in each community to increase visibility. Grant writing training was provided to all teams. Sustainability work to date has been highly successful; teams have done an effective job of recruiting new members, working closely with schools and other agencies, and all communities have met target goals for both receiving matching funds early on and obtaining additional local funds.



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