

Central New Mexico Education Needs Assessment

Funded by PNM & United Way of Central New Mexico



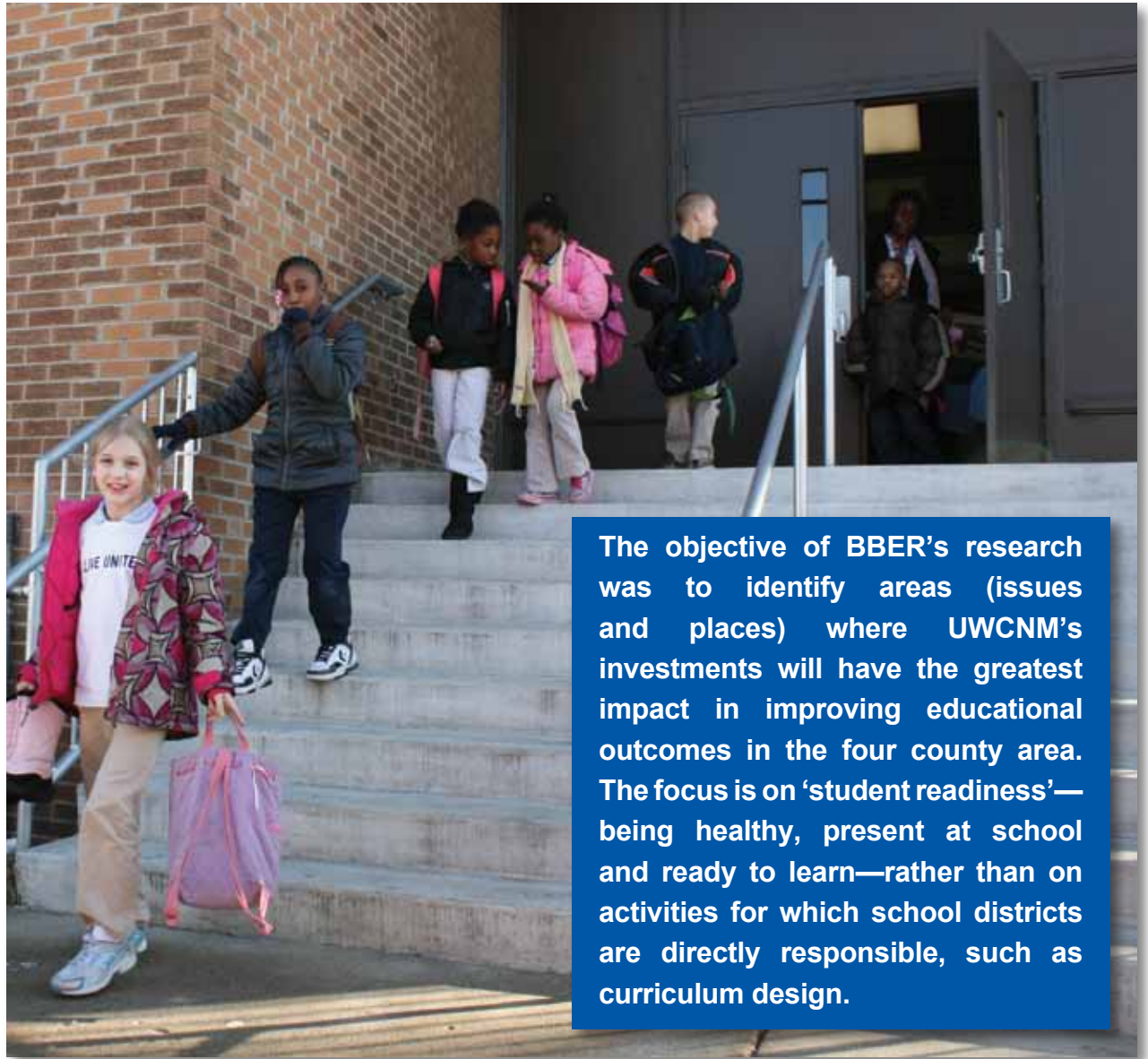
TABLE OF CONTENTS

OBJECTIVE	1
WHAT BBER DID	2
WHAT BBER LEARNED ABOUT BEST PRACTICES IN EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES	3
WHAT BBER LEARNED ABOUT EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES IN CENTRAL NEW MEXICO	6
WHAT BBER RECOMMENDS	8
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	12

OBJECTIVE

In 2010, as part of the Strategic Plan, United Way of Central New Mexico (UWCNM) embarked on an investigation of the issue of Education in our community. The goal is to learn where UWCNM can make the biggest impact in supporting educational goals in our community by participating in community conversations and related collaborations and strategically supporting specific programs through Community Fund grants.

As one of the first steps in that process and guided by the 2010 Strategic Plan, PNM and UWCNM combined their resources to hire UNM Bureau of Business and Economic Research (BBER) to conduct an education needs assessment in the four counties of central New Mexico. This work would not only support UWCNM's Strategic Plan, but would also serve as a pilot for other needs assessment and analysis work that PNM and other funders will conduct statewide.



The objective of BBER's research was to identify areas (issues and places) where UWCNM's investments will have the greatest impact in improving educational outcomes in the four county area. The focus is on 'student readiness'—being healthy, present at school and ready to learn—rather than on activities for which school districts are directly responsible, such as curriculum design.

WHAT BBER DID

Best Practices

BBER conducted a national review of educational policy and analysis, with focus on best practices and effective programming. A goal of the review was to identify specific programs – community-based, statewide and national – that have proven records of success. This included a review of more than 25 United Way initiatives, including all of those in the southwest and in other regions that are comparable to central New Mexico.

Local Interviews

BBER conducted in-depth interviews with 75 experts throughout the four-county area to better understand the conditions unique to our region. These individuals included policymakers, advocates, researchers, educators, administrators and service providers. The interviews sought to identify gaps in available services and the barriers faced by local families, communities and service providers.

Data Analysis

BBER collected and analyzed quantitative data from various sources, including NM Public Education Department and the U.S. Census Bureau to better understand the local socioeconomic determinants of educational achievement and to identify at-risk areas throughout the four-county area. To address issues that directly impact students and their schools, the research was conducted using data specific to the enrollment boundaries of elementary schools.



WHAT BBER LEARNED ABOUT BEST PRACTICES IN EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES

There is a strong consensus among both national and local educators, researchers and policy leaders regarding best practices in educational support services.



Intake and assessment: early universal intake and needs assessment programs help to identify at-risk children and families. Identifying needs as early as possible makes the greatest impact and can encourage families' participation in the programs by minimizing the stigma associated with individualized assessment.



Start early: programs that address the needs of young children and families (beginning with pre-natal support) produce the best outcomes and have the highest return on investment. Schools report that many have had success in limiting the widening of the achievement gap between the educationally advantaged and disadvantaged children over the course of their schooling. However, the gap that children face upon first entering school tends to persist throughout, even resulting in differences in graduation rates.



Quality counts: despite their costs, quality programming generates higher rates of return on investment than lower-cost programs. Quality programming begins with professional and well-trained teachers and is especially important for early childhood educators who may not receive the same level of ongoing professional development.

WHAT BBER LEARNED ABOUT BEST PRACTICES IN EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES

Parents and Families: effective educational support services must address the needs of the entire family and must engage parents as the child's first educators and primary advocates. A child at risk at home is likely to be a child at risk at school, and only interventions that engage parents and families are likely to be effective over the long term.



“Good, bright kids are ending up in the juvenile justice system simply because they don’t have any adults to advocate for them. Supporting parents to support kids is crucial.”

— Local community-based service coordinator

WHAT BBER LEARNED ABOUT BEST PRACTICES IN EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES



Coordination of services: educational support services must be coordinated to address the full range of the child's needs, from health, nutrition and safety to developmental progress, early literacy and skill acquisition. 'Whole child' programs that facilitate access and emphasize early and preventive intervention help to ensure that the benefits of individual programs are not lost to narrow gaps in services.



Align services: transitions (from home into early childhood services, into kindergarten and elementary school, into middle school and into high school) are periods of vulnerability, as the child and caregivers assume new responsibilities but often lose contact with prior support services. Effective programs bridge these transitions, providing continuity to ensure that the child continues to build upon earlier successes.



Relevant educational experience: to prevent disengagement and drop out, children going through difficult middle and high school years benefit from programs that connect their educational experience to their individual interests and affirm their continuing value to the community. These programs help to make their academic experiences relevant and engage them intellectually, emotionally and socially.

In short, the keys to successful educational support programs are early assessment and intervention, parent, family and community engagement, and the coordination, alignment and integration of services.

“Coordinate, collaborate, don't duplicate.”

— Local community education advocate

WHAT BBER LEARNED ABOUT EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES IN CENTRAL NEW MEXICO



Despite a consensus about best practices, families, service providers and funders in central New Mexico face significant barriers in effective implementation of these best practices.

Family perspective: children who underperform in school are often raised in families that do not value educational achievement and/or do not associate early childhood development with later educational achievement. Caregivers, particularly those with children most at-risk, often find access to services prohibitively complex and/or socially stigmatizing and unwelcoming. Middle and high school students often disengage from school studies because they fail to see relevance to their personal interests and social lives. Families face very different barriers in accessing services in urban areas such as Albuquerque or Los Lunas and the rural areas of Sandoval, Torrance, Valencia counties. Programs often fail to address the specific conditions in urban vs rural areas.

WHAT BBER LEARNED ABOUT EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES IN CENTRAL NEW MEXICO

Provider perspective: funding mechanisms tend to encourage providers to differentiate ('silo') rather than collaborate. This is true both among community-based organizations (CBOs) and between CBOs and schools. Professional culture and training also contribute to this differentiation and separation of services.

Service providers often lack a systematic approach in identifying populations most in need of services. Many providers in central New Mexico, especially those working in early childhood services, find it difficult to recruit and retain a qualified workforce.

Policy perspective: individual funders and funders as a group lack a wide-system perspective and an institutional framework necessary to promote coordination and collaboration among service providers; like CBOs, funders tend to work in isolation of each other, especially in the allocation and distribution of resources.

Funders often fail to require and/or account for the costs of data collection and assessment, making it difficult to implement evidenced-based programming.

In short, while system-wide funding is inadequate and gaps in services are everywhere, investments to improve the efficiency of existing funding – by facilitating access and promoting coordination – are likely to have the greatest impact in improving outcomes.

“Large-scale social change comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organizations.”
— John Kania and Mark Kramer



WHAT BBER RECOMMENDS

These recommendations are designed to alleviate barriers specific to central New Mexico and to enable the implementation of commonly accepted best practices.



Early childhood organization: work with early childhood service advocates and providers to establish a funded organization to coordinate early childhood programs and initiatives; to write a strategic plan with clearly stated objectives and metrics; to serve as an advocacy and resource center; and to provide cross-disciplinary training and facilitate programmatic collaboration both between community-based service providers and with public schools.

Intake and needs assessment: work with local hospitals and birthing centers, service organizations and schools to create more universal systems for intake and needs assessment. This initiative will help to ensure that services are reaching those most at-risk and also provide reliable and consistent information about community and individual needs.

Model: UTAHCLICKS.org.

“Various socioeconomic problems are traced to low levels of skills and social ability that are best developed in the earliest ages – from birth to five.”

**— James Heckman, Ph.D
Nobel Prize Laureate
in Economics.**

WHAT BBER RECOMMENDS



Professional development in early childhood services: work with early childhood service advocates and providers to promote and support the professionalization and training of the child development service workforce. This is an essential step toward the provision of quality child development programs that are known to lead to improved academic performance.

Model: TEACHNM.org.

Mentoring and community service programs: work with schools and community-based organizations to establish mentoring and community service programs for middle and high school students. These programs help to prevent school dropout by extending children's educational experiences beyond the classroom to areas relevant to their personal and community life.

Model: www.OASISCENTER.org.

Service coordination and alignment: privately fund and/or incentivize effective case management services to engage and empower parents; coordinate child and family 'wraparound' services; provide referrals and facilitate access to available resources; and help to align services during critical transition periods. Privately funded case managers could work with schools in at-risk areas (see Family Resource Centers). Programs to incentivize collaboration and case management could be modeled on the Pathways model first developed at Ohio's Community Health Access Program (CHAP-Ohio.net), now used at Bernalillo County Pathways with adult populations.

“Money spent on achievement-oriented initiatives is wasted if kids are dropping out. Unfortunately, the programs that support engagement and lower drop-out rates are the first to be cut.”

— Local education policy analyst

WHAT BBER RECOMMENDS

Community Schools and Family Resource Centers: work with other funders, community based organizations, service providers and schools to establish 'one-stop-shops' that aggregate family and educational support services and facilitate case management and service referral. In collaboration with public school systems, resource centers could be located in schools, which facilitate interaction with teachers and other school professionals, ease of access, connections to the community, while also reducing costs.

Models: publicly funded resource centers include the Kentucky Family Resource and Youth Services Centers (chfs.ky.gov/dfrcvs/frysc).

Importantly, resource centers should be structured differently in urban and rural areas:



In urban areas, resource centers should be located in high need neighborhoods with extended hours to accommodate family and school schedules. ABC Community Schools Partnership could serve as a key liaison in the Albuquerque Public School (APS) district.



In rural areas, resource centers should be on a consistent but rotating schedule in various locations (e.g. public schools) in each county to minimize the very strict limitations of geographical isolation and high travel costs for families. Support for transportation is valuable.

WHAT BBER RECOMMENDS



Braiding funding and services: collaborate with other funders, service providers, community based organizations, and perhaps schools to establish a forum to define priorities, identify gaps in educational support programming, develop metrics to track progress, coordinate funding and ensure the sustainability of effective programs. This is essential because currently, child service and educational support programs are driven by the initiatives of providers, which must differentiate programs to secure funding. Funders have an explicit interest in system-wide efficiency and collaboration.

Model: 21st Century Schools (www.yale.edu/21c).

“People like to pop in, do something and leave as quick as possible but there aren’t quick fixes. These issues need sustained, committed, on-the-ground work.”

— Local School-Based Health coordinator

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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— Dr. Jeff Mitchell

ABC Community Schools Partnership
ABEC (Albuquerque Business Education Compact)
Albuquerque Public Schools
Alta Mira Specialized Family Services
Belen School District
Bernalillo Pathways to a Healthy Community
Bernalillo School District
Office of Senator Bingaman
Bureau of Indian Education
Central Region Education Cooperative
Con Cariño Child Development Center
Cuba Independent School District
Cuba Schools Wellness Center
ECAN (Early Childhood Action Network)
El Centro de Igualdad y Derechos
Encuentro
ENLACE (Engaging Latino Communities for Education)
Estancia Municipal School District
First Choice Community Health Care
Five Sandoval Indian Pueblos Inc.
Jemez Valley School District
La Vida Felicidad Inc.
Los Lunas Kiwanis Club
Midwest Community Action Program
Moriarty Municipal School District
Mountainair Public School District
Nacimiento Community Foundation
NAPPR (Native American Professional Parent Resources)
National Children's Study (UNM – Valencia)
Navajo Nation – Pueblo Pintado Chapter
Navajo Nation – Torreon Chapter
NMAEYC (New Mexico Association for the Education of Young Children)
NMBREE (New Mexico Business Roundtable for Educational Excellence)
New Mexico Alliance for School Based Health
New Mexico Children Youth & Families Department
New Mexico Children's Cabinet
New Mexico Community Foundation
New Mexico Department of Health
New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership
New Mexico Immigrant Law Center
New Mexico Public Education Department
Partnership for a Healthy Torrance
PRO (Parents Reaching Out)
Partnership for Community Action
Rio Rancho School District
San Felipe Pueblo
Santo Domingo Pueblo
St. Joseph Community Health
Torrance County Head Start
Torrance County Project Office
UNM Center for Development & Disability
UNM Center for Education Policy Research
UNM College of Education
UNM College of Nursing
UNM Family Development Program,
UNM – Valencia
Valencia Resiliency Corps
Varela Group
YDI (Youth Development Inc.)

EDUCATION SUPPORT SYSTEMS

