2019-2020

Evaluation Plan for Las Cumbres Community Services – Nurturing Centers

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1. **Introduction**

Las Cumbres Community Services (LCCS) was established in 1970, providing day habilitation services for developmentally disabled adults in Los Alamos. In 1979, the agency expanded with a preschool in the Espanola Valley, and has since further expanded to include services for children, adults, and families throughout Northern New Mexico. The mission of LCCS and its staff, as one of the largest social service providers in Northern New Mexico, is as follows: to provide quality services, public awareness, and integrated community supports for children, adults, and families facing social, emotional, and/or developmental challenges.

As a provider in a largely rural region that lacks access to specialized health resources, LCCS has constructed a wide-network of service programs and structures in order to help their communities. One such program is the Taos County Nurturing Centers, which have two locations: the Enos Garcia Elementary School in Taos and Peñasco's Elementary School. These Nurturing Centers are designed to meet the social and emotional needs of children "who are disproportionately exposed to adverse childhood experiences, toxic stress, and significant environmental risk factors" when compared to state and national statistics (LCCS Nurturing Center Mission & Vision, https://www.lascumbres-nm.org/nurturing-centers). Support offered at the centers include, but are not limited to: homework assistance, crisis intervention, and mentoring. Reflecting the Las Cumbres approach of connecting families to a range of services, families also have access to other offered programs, such as the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren program. Community members looking for specific LCCS services are often connected to multiple programs within the organization so that they can benefit from a variety of services that support their needs.

2. **Purpose of Evaluation**

The purpose of the UNM Evaluation Lab is to build evaluation capacity within partnering organizations. This is the fifth year of Las Cumbres' partnership with the UNM Evaluation Lab, with this year's evaluation work centering on the Taos County Nurturing Centers. Past work included data collection practices/systems, overall client experiences, and the development of a

multi-year evaluation plan to gauge the academic engagement of Kindergarteners who matriculated from LCCS' Conjunto Pre-K program.

The Evaluation Team, in partnership with LCCS, will work to establish an evaluation foundation within the Nurturing Centers. This young program will be undergoing grant and resource allocation discussions; by working with the hands-on staff in the Nurturing Centers, the UNM Eval Lab will help collect staff experiences and thoughts that will be crucial for those discussions. Work with the LCCS Nurturing Center's will include the creation of a program-level logic model, designing a rubric to showcase what an "ideal" Nurturing Center would look like, and generally facilitating dialogue between LCCS and the Nurturing Centers.
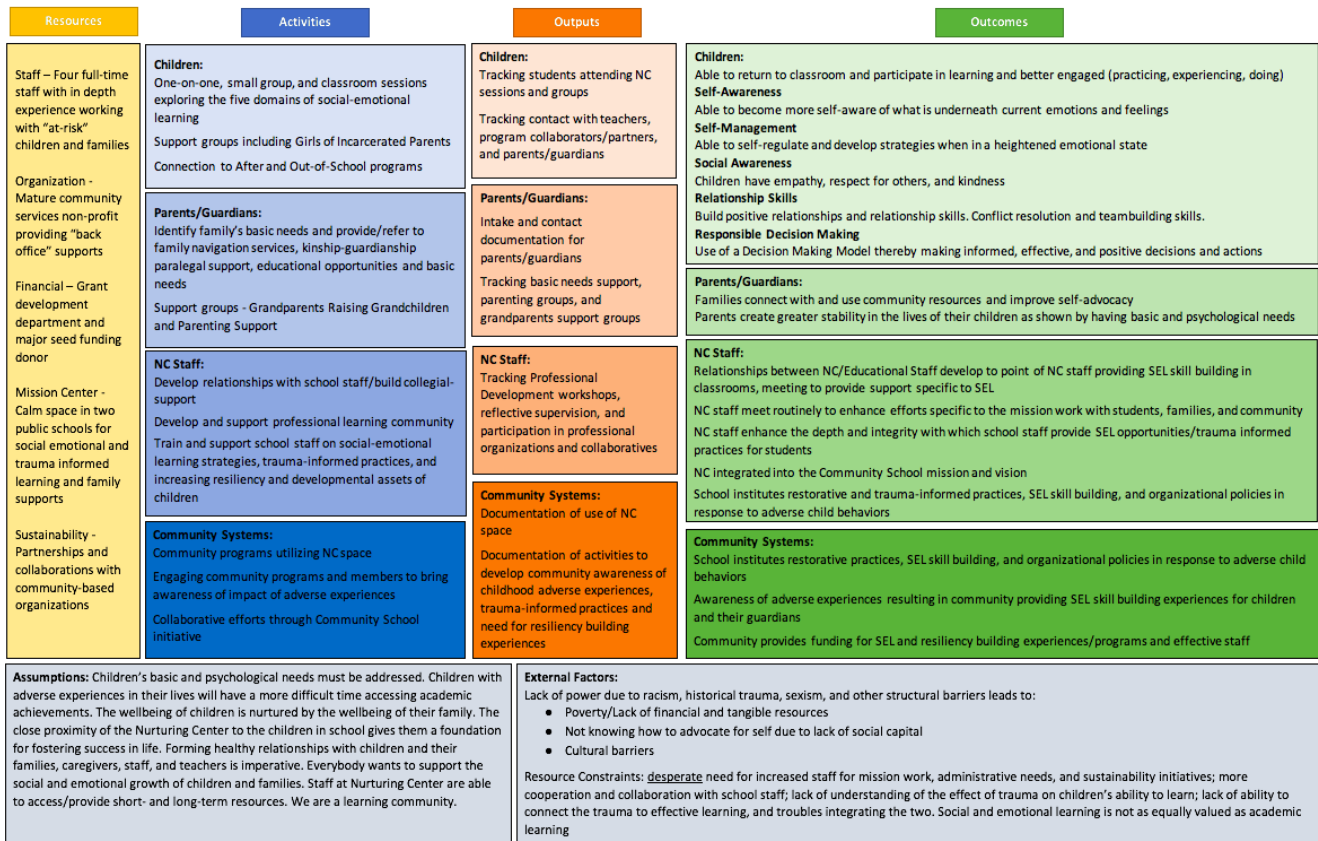
3. **Logic Model**

The logic model below was created in collaboration between the Las Cumbres Nurturing Center staff and the UNM Evaluation Team as an illustration of the program as a whole. The model is divided into resources, activities, outputs, and outcomes. Additionally, assumptions, or what must be true for the program to succeed, and external factors that may positively or negatively influence the program are considered. The most important assumption the Nurturing Center staff highlighted is that there is always room for growth and learning. The resources section lists the current resources that the program has, including physical space, financial resources, and collaborative relationships. Due to the breadth of work the nurturing center performs, the activities, outputs, and outcomes have been categorized into children, parents/guardians, Nurturing Center staff, and community systems. The activities are the regular actions the staff of the Nurturing Center, such as one on one interactions with the children, support groups, and supporting families in accessing resources to fulfill basic needs.

The outputs section represents the results of activities conducted by the program. For example, the Nurturing Center tracks the number of interactions had with children and families as one way to evaluate the extent of their reach. Outcomes highlighted in the logic model are entirely short-term outcomes that help illustrate that the program is having the desired positive impact it set out to do, fulfilling its mission. The Nurturing Center is currently focusing on more direct and immediate outcomes, such as a child's ability to return to the classroom and participate and better engage in the learning environment. The outcomes for children are organized by the

5 Domains of Social Emotional Learning: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. The outcomes for both children and the other groups impacted by the Nurturing Center represent what immediate success looks like for those who have used the services of the centers. Understanding the ideal short-term outcomes is also what will direct the next steps of the program evaluation to help the Nurturing Center to become more sustainable and continue making an impact. The logic model is a living document for the program and can be used to guide program decisions and can be updated to best reflect the program at any time.

Figure 1: Logic Model for Las Cumbres Community Services Nurturing Center

See Appendix for full-page Logic Model.

4. Literature Review

The Las Cumbres Nurturing Centers are founded on the importance and necessity of social and emotional learning (SEL) for young students. As the Nurturing Centers are situated within schools, they have access to students that have been affected by Adverse Childhood

Experiences (ACEs), allowing the Nurturing Center staff to serve children at a crucial development stage in their lives. LCCS Nurturing Centers face two major issues in supplying students with these critical SEL services: teachers and administrators understanding the importance of SEL programs, and the sustainability of such programs.

Of the obstacles that the LCCS Nurturing Centers face, one of the most noticeable is the lack of buy-in from some of administrators and teachers. This is not a unique problem to the Taos County NCs. Components of social and emotional learning are sometimes seen as an attempt by students to get out of classroom settings, or that social and emotional learning programs are outside the role of teachers as educators. However, as outlined by a 2008 study, ACEs are naturally linked to low reading abilities, lower rates of graduation, and lower GPAs (Ford et al, 2008). Combating the underlying causes of these issues through SEL programs is therefore important to educators, especially when "teacher success" is often measured by student outcomes and year-to-year improvement. Arguments can be made that SEL programs can lead to increased academic performance of students who are offered these services, as a widely cited 2011 meta-analysis of school-based social and emotional learning programs showed. In over 213 programs covering more than 270,000 children, emotional *and* academic performance increases were seen in schools where these programs were implemented (Durlak et al, 2011). Improvements were universal, seen across various demographic factors (rural v. urban, elementary v. high school). Supporting this meta-analysis, a 2002 study closely linked social skills and academic performance of young students (Malecki & Elliott, 2002). By improving a young child's social skills through Nurturing Center services, the child's subsequent social skills in the classroom may lead to noticeable academic performance improvements. Ultimately, teachers looking to increase the academic performance of their students would be well-served by seeing the value of SEL trainings, programs, and services.

Meanwhile, for administrative buy-in, the culture of "that's not the way we do things here" can often be a hurdle. Additionally, there are many factors that inhibit scaling up social-emotional learning programs in schools, including faculty and staff turnover, school systems favoring more immediately measurable short-term gains, interventions rarely being implemented as planned, limited resources, and the previously mentioned lack of "willingness to change" (Elias et al., 2003). While implementations of SEL programs are certainly not without issues, they can

actually reduce administrative burdens in the long-run. One high school where trauma-informed systems were implemented saw massive reductions in time-siphoning administrative punishments: expulsions were reduced by 40%, suspensions by 85%, and written referrals by 50% (Walkley & Cox, 2013). Additionally, innovative programs like the Nurturing Centers can reduce stress from the teachers while providing Social Emotional Learning environments for the children. Nurturing Center staff, as promoters of social and emotional learning, can therefore be boons to both administrators and teachers.

5. **Context**

Taos County is facing serious socio-economic issues. Children in Taos County are 33% more likely to be involved in abuse cases when compared to New Mexico as a whole (Figure 2). Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) like these have damaging long-term effects on a child's development. In addition to this child-abuse statistic, children in the county are 30% more likely to have zero employed parents in the household (Figure 3), and are more likely to be raised by their grandparents than children across New Mexico, all while these caretaker scenarios in Taos are disproportionately living at or below the Federal Poverty Level. Children being raised in these families are more likely to be subjected to trauma and adverse experiences, which requires social and emotional learning services to address. Within Enos Garcia Elementary, children seen by the Nurturing Center have high-levels of self-reported ACEs (Figure 4). Of the 104 students seen by the center in 2015-16 school year, 44% had domestic violence issues in their homes, 36% had a currently or previously incarcerated parent (3.6 times the statewide average), 21% had substance abuse issues in their homes, and 21% had housing instability. As children can exhibit more than one of these ACEs, these percentages add up to more than 100%. Additionally, children visiting the Nurturing Center do not always open up about issues in their home lives, so these statistics should be seen as a baseline with the potential for higher numbers in reality. Regardless, the data shows the incredible need for SEL programs (like the Nurturing Centers) in Taos County.
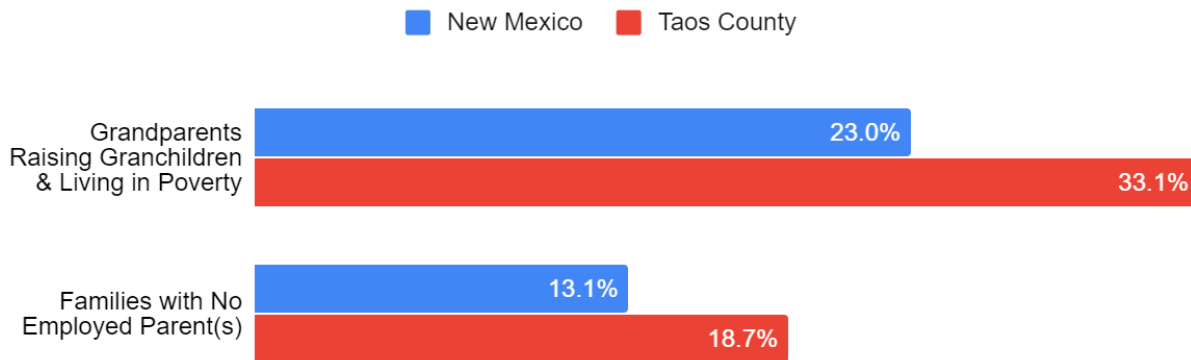
Figure 2: Child Abuse Cases Per 1000 People, Taos County vs New Mexico Statewide Average
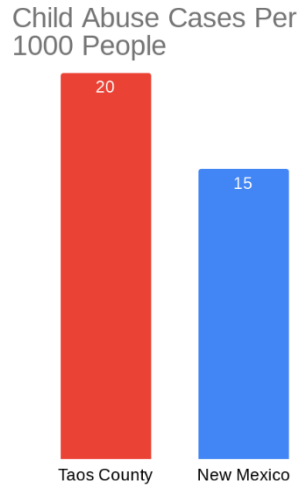
Data Source: NM KIDS COUNT, using 2018 NM CYFD Protective Services Report
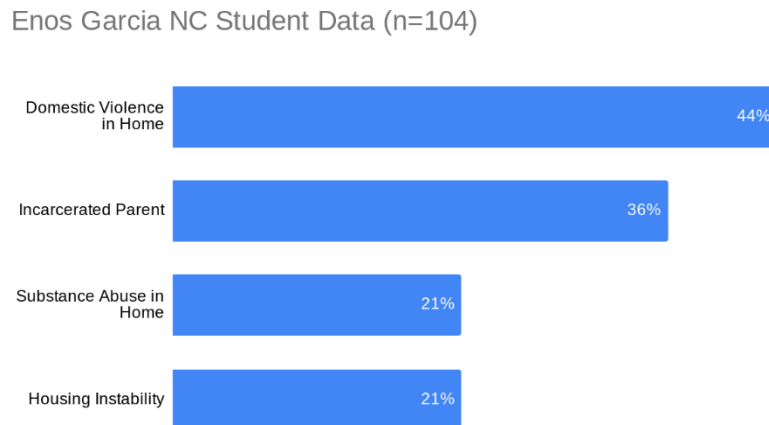
Figure 3: Socioeconomic Factors Affecting Children of Taos County

Data Source: NM KIDS COUNT, using US Census Bureau's American Community Survey

Figure 4: Childhood Risk Factors affecting Enos Garcia's Students Who Have Used the NC

Enos Garcia NC Student Data (n=104)

Data Source: Self-collected by NC Staff during 2015-16 School Year from children using the NC

6. Evaluation Team & Other Stakeholders

Evaluation Team:

- Sonia Bettez, UNM Evaluation Lab Team Lead
- Alex Willey, UNM Evaluation Lab Fellow, MPA Student
- Samuel Hatch, UNM Evaluation Lab Fellow, MPP Student
- Siena Sanderson, Enos Garcia Nurturing Center Director
- Andy Grief, Nurturing Navigator
- Candy Allen, Nurturing Navigator
- Amanda Bissell, LCCS Evaluation Coordinator

Other Stakeholders:

- Megan Délano, LCCS Executive Director
- Claudia Díaz Fuentes, UNM Evaluation Lab Director

7. Evaluation Activities & Timeline

September 2019

- Meet with Amanda Bissell, Las Cumbres Evaluation Coordinator, to establish contact and ascertain the nature of potential programs.
- Collect and review relevant literature.

October 2019

- Conduct Observation of Nurturing Centers in Enos Garcia Elementary School in Taos, NM and Peñasco Elementary School in Peñasco, NM on October 17th.
- Following the observation, UNM Evaluation Lab Team will meet with the Nurturing Center Team to create revised Schedule of Work (SOW) as well as evaluation goals.

- Create Nurturing Center specific logic model with full team on October 29th via Zoom.
- Define evaluation goals with team.

November 2019

- Confirm Statement of Work and Logic Model with organization.
- Finalize Logic Model creation with NC Staff.

December 2019

- Incorporate all materials into the Evaluation Plan; revise as needed from organization/instructor feedback.
- Presentation on December 2nd covering all work completed to date.

January 2020

- UNM Eval Team will meet to design focus group protocols and questions on January 9th. Proposed protocols will be sent to LCCS and NC staff to get feedback.
- UNM Eval Team will meet with NC staff on January 20th to conduct focus group. Aim of the focus group will be to collect thoughts, experiences, and goals of the NC Staff in relation to children, teachers, school administration, and LCCS as a parent-organization.
- Following the focus group, the UNM Eval Team will conduct rubric design workshop with the LCCS Nurturing Center. Rubrics will address what an "ideal" Nurturing Center truly means.

February 2020

- Begin drafting final evaluation report.

March 2020

- Delivery of final report

The final month of the evaluation will be dedicated to reporting final results. All data collection and analysis will be completed, and all results /recommendations will be presented in the final report.

References

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Joseph A. Durlak, Allison B. Dymnicki, Rebecca D. Taylor, Roger P. Weissberg, & Kriston B. Schellinger. (2011). The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions. Child Development, 82(1), 405-432.

Ko, S. J., Ford, J. D., Kassam-Adams, N., Berkowitz, S. J., Wilson, C., Wong, M., & Layne, C. M. (2008). Creating Trauma-Informed Systems: Child Welfare, Education, First Responders, Health Care, Juvenile Justice. Professional Psychology Research and Practice, 4, 396.

Malecki, C. K., & Elliott, S. N. (2002). Children's Social Behaviors as Predictors of Academic Achievement: A Longitudinal Analysis. School Psychology Quarterly, 1, 1.

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Appendix

Resources	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
Staff – Four full-time staff with in depth experience working with "at-risk" children and families Organization - Mature community services non-profit providing "back office" supports Financial – Grant development department and major seed funding donor Mission Center - Calm space in two public schools for social emotional and trauma informed learning and family supports Sustainability - Partnerships and collaborations with community-based organizations	**Children:** One-on-one, small group, and classroom sessions exploring the five domains of social-emotional learning Support groups including Girls of Incarcerated Parents Connection to After and Out-of-School programs	**Children:** Tracking students attending NC sessions and groups Tracking contact with teachers, program collaborators/partners, and parents/guardians	**Children:** Able to return to classroom and participate in learning and better engaged (practicing, experiencing, doing) **Self-Awareness** Able to become more self-aware of what is underneath current emotions and feelings **Self-Management** Able to self-regulate and develop strategies when in a heightened emotional state **Social Awareness** Children have empathy, respect for others, and kindness **Relationship Skills** Build positive relationships and relationship skills. Conflict resolution and teambuilding skills. **Responsible Decision Making** Use of a Decision Making Model thereby making informed, effective, and positive decisions and actions
	Parents/Guardians: Identify family's basic needs and provide/refer to family navigation services, kinship-guardianship paralegal support, educational opportunities and basic needs Support groups - Grandparents Raising Grandchildren and Parenting Support	**Parents/Guardians:** Intake and contact documentation for parents/guardians Tracking basic needs support, parenting groups, and grandparents support groups	**Parents/Guardians:** Families connect with and use community resources and improve self-advocacy Parents create greater stability in the lives of their children as shown by having basic and psychological needs
	NC Staff: Develop relationships with school staff/build collegial-support Develop and support professional learning community Train and support school staff on social-emotional learning strategies, trauma-informed practices, and increasing resiliency and developmental assets of children	**NC Staff:** Tracking Professional Development workshops, reflective supervision, and participation in professional organizations and collaboratives	**NC Staff:** Relationships between NC/Educational Staff develop to point of NC staff providing SEL skill building in classrooms, meeting to provide support specific to SEL NC staff meet routinely to enhance efforts specific to the mission work with students, families, and community NC staff enhance the depth and integrity with which school staff provide SEL opportunities/trauma informed practices for students NC integrated into the Community School mission and vision School institutes restorative and trauma-informed practices, SEL skill building, and organizational policies in response to adverse child behaviors
	Community Systems: Community programs utilizing NC space Engaging community programs and members to bring awareness of impact of adverse experiences Collaborative efforts through Community School initiative	**Community Systems:** Documentation of use of NC space Documentation of activities to develop community awareness of childhood adverse experiences, trauma-informed practices and need for resiliency building experiences	**Community Systems:** School institutes restorative practices, SEL skill building, and organizational policies in response to adverse child behaviors Awareness of adverse experiences resulting in community providing SEL skill building experiences for children and their guardians Community provides funding for SEL and resiliency building experiences/programs and effective staff

Assumptions: Children's basic and psychological needs must be addressed. Children with adverse experiences in their lives will have a more difficult time accessing academic achievements. The wellbeing of children is nurtured by the wellbeing of their family. The close proximity of the Nurturing Center to the children in school gives them a foundation for fostering success in life. Forming healthy relationships with children and their families, caregivers, staff, and teachers is imperative. Everybody wants to support the social and emotional growth of children and families. Staff at Nurturing Center are able to access/provide short- and long-term resources. We are a learning community.

External Factors:
Lack of power due to racism, historical trauma, sexism, and other structural barriers leads to:
- Poverty/Lack of financial and tangible resources
- Not knowing how to advocate for self due to lack of social capital
- Cultural barriers

Resource Constraints: desperate need for increased staff for mission work, administrative needs, and sustainability initiatives; more cooperation and collaboration with school staff; lack of understanding of the effect of trauma on children's ability to learn; lack of ability to connect the trauma to effective learning, and troubles integrating the two. Social and emotional learning is not as equally valued as academic learning