

Developmental Surveillance and Screening for All of Connecticut's Children: The First Step in a Comprehensive Approach to School Readiness

Developmental Screening

Development screening is a powerful strategy for addressing gaps in school readiness. Valid screening tools exist for children beginning at birth, which can be used in a variety of settings that serve young children and their families. Screening identifies children as early as possible who are at risk for poor developmental outcomes. When screening shows concerns or signs of delay, follow-up in the form of further assessment, connection to services and intervention is critical to ensuring that no child arrives at kindergarten with unidentified or untreated developmental concerns.

A recent report, [*"The Earlier the Better: Developmental Screening for Connecticut's Young Children,"*](#) highlights the role of screening in a comprehensive approach to school readiness. The report was prepared by [CHDI](#) and commissioned by the Health Promotion Workgroup of the [Connecticut Early Childhood Education Cabinet to inform the state's school readiness work.](#)

The report includes:

- Current research on the value of early detection of developmental and socio-emotional delays
- An examination of screening as part of a strategy for early detection
- An outline of valid available screening tools and their implementation across Connecticut
- Recommendations for how Connecticut can build a robust system of early identification of children with developmental and mental health needs as well as their connection to needed services.



A Comprehensive Approach for Connecticut

Connecticut is well positioned to achieve the goal of developing a universal, comprehensive and integrated system of early detection of children at risk through developmental surveillance and screening and connection to services. Best practice suggests that early detection systems include:

- Immediate follow-up discussion with the family about developmental concerns
- Connection to follow-up assessment and intervention through pediatric, mental health or other specialists; home visiting programs; and parent education and support
- Feedback from the follow-up service provider back to the medical home to ensure optimal coordination of care

Connecticut has already built a foundation for this work:

- [United Way 211 Child Development Infoline \(CDI\)](#) and services offered through [Help Me Grow](#) provide the cornerstone for a comprehensive system. CDI offers families screening through a mail-in version of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire. Within the next few months, CDI will also have an online system available for families to complete screening. CDI staff review completed screens that families submit, share information from screening with child health providers, follow up when there are concerns and connect families to a variety of follow-up assessment and intervention services. When concerns are raised and children will not qualify for state mandated

early intervention services, CDI can link families to community-based programs through the Help Me Grow system.

- **In Connecticut, child health care providers completed more than 24,000 developmental screens for children enrolled in Medicaid in 2012**, a notable increase over five years as the result of training and financial incentives. As children use health care services frequently during their early years, this is an ideal setting for screening.
- **Connecticut's Head Start sites screened more than 6,000 children in 2012 -- 96% of the children in their programs.** Home visiting programs in Connecticut also screened children, with a combined outreach to almost 3,000 children through Nurturing Families and Child First. Early care and education offers another opportunity to screen young children for developmental delays and risks.

The Office of Early Childhood can provide the leadership and cross systems planning to take this foundation and build (as the report recommends) a robust system of early identification and connection to needed services. Resources provided through the new Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grant, and if funded the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge, will support this systems development and implementation. A systemic approach will assure optimal early detection, intervention and data capacities within Connecticut.

The Earlier The Better: Developmental Screening for Connecticut's Young Children report is available at www.chdi.org or (<http://www.ctearlychildhood.org/meetings.html>). Printed copies are available from CHDI upon request: 860-679-1519.

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