

Early Childhood Comprehensive Assessment System

Part I: Developmental Screening in Early Childhood



COLORADO
Department of Education

Comprehensive Early Childhood Assessment System

A comprehensive assessment system is an important component of state and local early childhood systems. A thoughtfully designed system of assessment ensures that children who are experiencing challenges in development and learning are identified as soon as possible and are connected to the services and programs that best meet their needs. It also provides methods for monitoring the progress that children make in their early learning programs in order to inform individualized planning and to communicate with families. Effective comprehensive assessment systems engage families at every level, are accessible, and are coordinated to streamline processes and avoid duplication. They make use of valid and reliable methods and instruments so that families and early care and education providers can have confidence in the results. A comprehensive assessment system utilizes three main assessment components: developmental screening, evaluation and assessment for determining eligibility and ongoing formative assessment.

Screening as Part of Eligibility Determination

Developmental screening instruments should be used by early childhood programs as one component in eligibility determination for the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) as well as in identification of children who may be in need of further evaluation for determining eligibility for special education services.

What is Developmental Screening For Young Children

Developmental screening involves the use of “brief, relatively inexpensive, standardized procedures or tests designed to quickly assess a large number of children to find out which ones need further evaluation” (Meisels & Atkins-Burnett, 2005). Screening instruments commonly used by early childhood programs in Colorado include the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) and the Early Screening Inventory-Revised (ESI-R), as reported by CPP programs in the Intent to Continue and Annual Report. Screening instruments must be valid and reliable. CDE does not endorse the use of “homegrown” tools that are created by individual school districts or programs because these instruments have not been subjected to validity and reliability studies necessary for establishing the scientific integrity of the tool. Screening results should be considered along with additional information to ensure that the results accurately represent the child’s present level of learning and development. If those who know the child best have information that conflicts with the screening results, professional judgment will guide next steps which could include proceeding to an evaluation, rescreening and/or ongoing observation by members of the family and program staff.

Why Is Developmental Screening Important?

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) guidelines for developmentally appropriate assessment practice endorse screening of all children to identify those who have special learning or developmental needs and to plan appropriate curriculum and instruction. All children being considered for placement in the Colorado Preschool Program should be screened with a valid and reliable developmental screening tool. Preschool age children who have already been determined eligible for preschool special education services should not automatically be screened as they are already identified as needing specialized supports and services. The use of a valid and reliable screening tool helps identify children with mild lags in development who can benefit from participation in a high quality preschool. When developmental screening results show significantly lower than expected levels of development, a referral for additional evaluation should be made to determine whether special education services may support the



child in benefitting from the general preschool curriculum. Early identification of children with special education needs helps children receive services as early as possible so they have the best chance of success in kindergarten and beyond. Identifying children eligible for special education early in each program year helps ensure that appropriate funding types are used for CPP and early childhood special education, thus maximizing the number of children who can benefit from the programs and services that best meet their needs.

District preschool advisory councils should use summary information from their child screening process, as well as any other sources available, to determine which risk factors are present in their community and impacting young children and their families. This information supports councils to guide outreach to families and the community and design program offerings.

Developmental Screening As An Element Of The Eligibility Determination Process For The Colorado Preschool Program

Developmental screening should be conducted prior to the child's entry into an early childhood program or preschool as an important part of the process to determine a child's eligibility for CPP. This also provides the opportunity to determine if a referral to Child Find is needed as soon as there is a suspicion that the child may have an educational disability. When developmental screening results are used as a part of the determination of eligibility for CPP, screening results should be kept in CPP eligibility files as documentation of eligibility.

In addition to developmental screening, school districts must also consider information obtained from family interviews, demographic information (from a preschool application and the Family Economic Data Survey) and observations of children in natural settings (during home visits). It is also important to conduct vision and hearing screenings to rule out potentially treatable causes of developmental delay.

Who Conducts Developmental Screening?

Whoever conducts developmental screening must be trained to use the tools they are administering. In many school districts, teachers conduct screening at home visits or during family interviews in the course of the eligibility determination process. In primary health care offices across Colorado, children are screened in well-child visits, a practice which is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. CDE recommends that the school district CPP intake process include a question about whether the family has recently participated in developmental screening through a well-child visit. If so, family permission should be obtained for release of those results rather than screening children on multiple occasions within the same time period.

What Is Child Find's Role In Developmental Screening?

A plan for developmental screening should be a coordinated community effort. Collaborative working agreements between school district CPP staff and Child Find teams should guide the screening process and help assure the best use of each team's capacity and resources while streamlining the process for families. It should be noted that Child Find teams are not responsible for providing all developmental screening for children being considered for entry into preschool. Child Find is required to do evaluation of children who are identified as potentially needing special education services to benefit from instruction in the preschool setting. Each CPP district preschool advisory council needs to develop a plan for conducting developmental screening including the purchase of tools and staff training in the use of the selected tools.

When an educational disability is suspected as a result of the developmental screening process, children should be referred to Child Find following the local special education referral process consistent with the Exceptional Children's Education Act. Local processes and agreements between Child Find and CPP programs should not include long delays or lags between developmental screening, referral and evaluation of the child for special education. Efficient and timely

referral and evaluation processes will support districts and special education administrative units (AUs) to enroll children in the most appropriate programs and access the appropriate funding streams.

Children whose developmental screening scores are below the cut point for typical development, but who are determined ineligible for preschool special education services by the Child Find team, may be considered for eligibility for the Colorado Preschool Program. Three year-old children must have a minimum of three risk factors and four year-old children must have one risk factor in order to qualify. Ultimately, CPP program enrollment is subject to available space.

How Does Developmental Screening Differ From Formative Assessment?

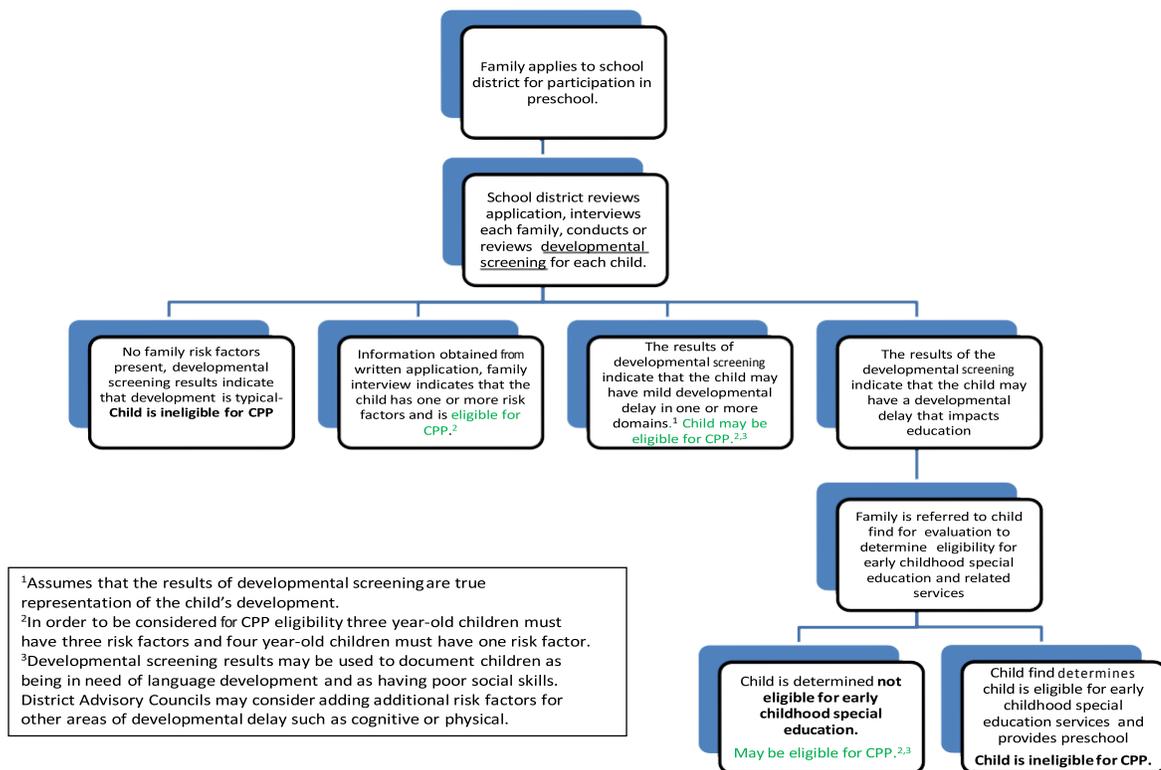
Developmental screening is conducted prior to the child’s entry into preschool and is used as a part of the process to determine the child’s eligibility for CPP or to determine whether a referral to Child Find for additional evaluation and assessment is warranted.

Formative assessments used in preschool such as Teaching Strategies GOLD® and HighScope COR Advantage are not screening instruments. These assessments are used to measure the developmental and academic growth of children over time as they participate in preschool or special education services. They are also used to plan and differentiate curriculum and instruction for each child.

While part of a body of information collected about children’s learning and development, screening is a only snapshot in time. Observational information, including family input gathered over time in the formative assessment process, should be the primary source of information used to develop an individual learning plan for each child.

How Does Developmental Screening Differ From Formative Assessment?

Below is an example of developmental screening embedded in the preschool enrollment process.





State and local early childhood systems are most effective when a comprehensive assessment system that includes developmental screening is in place. Family participation and community coordination and collaboration are the keys to an effective screening system. With this in place, communities can have confidence that children are connected to the services and programs that best meet their needs.

Where can I learn more?

- Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd/watch-me-thrive>
- Assuring Better Child Health & Development <http://www.coloradoabcd.org/> Colorado Preschool Program www.cde.state.co.us/cpp
- Preschool Special Education www.cde.state.co.us/early/preschool/specialed References:
- Meisels, S. J., & Atkins-Burnett, S. (2005). *Developmental screening in early childhood, a guide*. (5th ed.). Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children