

# Developmental Screening

## *Part of a Comprehensive Early Childhood Assessment System*



**COLORADO**  
Department of Education

## The Importance of Developmental Screening

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) guidelines for developmentally appropriate assessment practice recommend screening of all young children to identify those who have special learning or developmental needs, as well as to plan appropriate curriculum and instruction.

Any child being considered for enrollment in the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP), for example, should be screened with a technically adequate developmental screening tool in order to determine if the child exhibits delays known to be associated with children who are at risk. The use of a technically adequate screening tool helps identify children's current development, which aids professionals in determining who will benefit most from participation in a high-quality preschool. Any time developmental screening results show significantly lower than expected levels of development, a referral for a full evaluation should be made to the local Child Find contact in the child's school district of residence in order to determine whether special education services are needed for the child to benefit from the general preschool curriculum. However, preschool age children who have already been determined eligible for preschool special education services should not automatically be screened, as they will have already had comprehensive evaluation to establish their need for specialized supports and services.

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 are expected to periodically review information from all of their local child screening programs, as well as any other sources available, to determine which risk factors children in their community are experiencing. This information supports councils to guide outreach to families and the community and design or improve program offerings. Developmental screening should be a coordinated community effort, and the roles and responsibilities, as well as the expertise, of various programs should be considered in developing an overall screening plan. Each CPP district preschool advisory council needs to develop a plan for conducting developmental screening, including the purchase of tools and staff training to use the selected tools.

### Comprehensive Early Childhood Assessment System



The use of effective developmental screening instruments is an important component in eligibility determination for the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP). It also supports the identification of children who may be in need of further evaluation for determining eligibility for special education services, or other need-based services.

#### Where can I learn more?

- Assuring Better Child Health & Development  
<https://www.coloradoabcd.org/overview>
- Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive!  
[http://www.acf.hhs.gov/progr\\_ams/ece/watch-me-thrive](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/progr_ams/ece/watch-me-thrive)
- Colorado Preschool Program  
[www.cde.state.co.us/cpp](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cpp)
- Preschool Special Education  
[www.cde.state.co.us/early/pr\\_eschoolspecial](http://www.cde.state.co.us/early/pr_eschoolspecial)

## Conducting 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). The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) expects local education agencies to utilize screening instruments with strong technical adequacy, which pertains to their validity and reliability. CDE does not allow the use of “homegrown” tools that are created by individual school districts or programs for making decisions about programming because these instruments have not been subjected to validity and reliability studies necessary for establishing the scientific integrity of the tool.

In addition to utilizing valid and reliable screening tools, a screening program should always include gathering relevant additional information about the child 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 must guide next steps. Next steps may include proceeding to an evaluation, rescreening and/or ongoing observation by members of the family and program staff.

## Developmental Screening and Eligibility for CPP

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. Developmental screening of all children being considered for CPP also provides the opportunity to identify children who there may be reason to suspect have an educational disability, which should trigger an immediate referral to Child Find. Developmental screening results used as a part of the determination of eligibility for CPP must be kept in CPP eligibility files to document the child’s 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 expected that children receive vision and hearing screenings to rule out potentially treatable causes of developmental delay.

## The Professionals who Conduct Developmental Screening

Developmental screening can be conducted by professionals trained to use the tools they are administering. Manuals for each standardized screening tool describes the types of professionals and the education or expertise needed to administer the tools. In many school districts, teachers conduct screening during home visits or family interviews in the course of the eligibility determination process.

## Coordination across Programs and Services

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 suggests 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. Review of the results of the recent screening, rather than re-screening children, should inform next steps.

## Child Find's Role in Developmental Screening

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. 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.

It should be noted that Child Find teams are not responsible for providing all developmental screening for children being considered for entry into preschool. The purpose of Child Find is to identify and evaluate children who have a need for special education and related services. Child Find teams may conduct screening prior to comprehensive evaluations when it is uncertain whether a special education evaluation is necessary, or to help plan for the special education evaluation. Local processes and agreements between Child Find and CPP programs should make developmental screening, referral and evaluation of the child for special education efficient and timely. This will help ensure the child is enrolled in the most appropriate programs and accessing appropriate funding streams.

Children whose developmental screening scores are below the cut point for typical development, but who do not meet the eligibility criteria for preschool special education services, may be considered for eligibility for CPP. In these instances, certain developmental concerns may establish that the child exhibits one of the identified risk factors for CPP eligibility. Importantly, 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 and available funding should go to children identified as most at-risk.

## Developmental Screening is not Formative Assessment

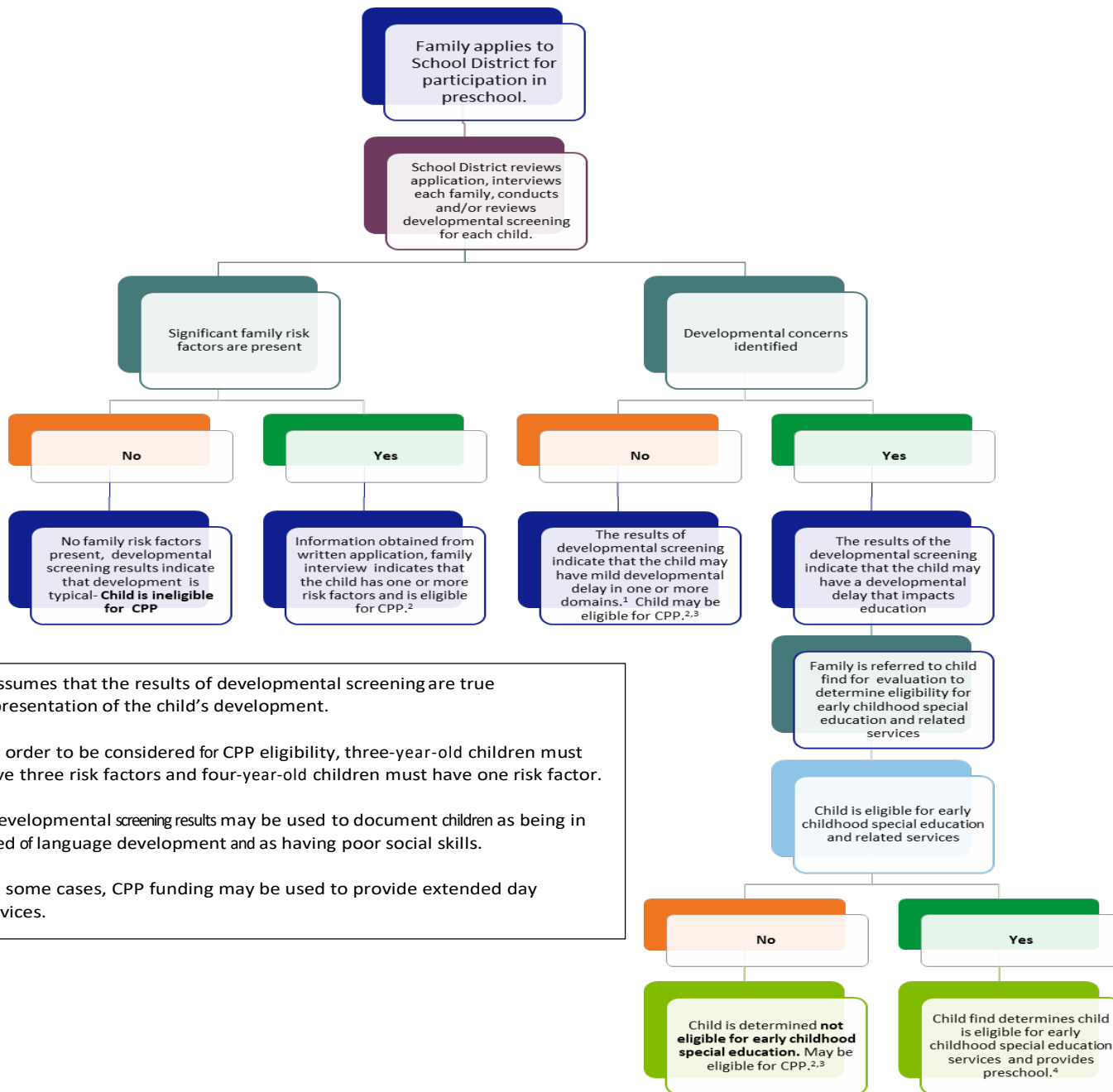
Developmental screening is conducted prior to the child's entry into preschool and is used as a part of the process to determine the child's eligibility for CPP or to determine whether a referral to Child Find for additional evaluation and assessment is warranted.

Formative assessments used in preschool such as *GOLD*® by Teaching Strategies and *COR Advantage*® by HighScope 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 only a 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.

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.

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



<sup>1</sup>Assumes that the results of developmental screening are true representation of the child’s development.

<sup>2</sup>In order to be considered for CPP eligibility, three-year-old children must have three risk factors and four-year-old children must have one risk factor.

<sup>3</sup>Developmental screening results may be used to document children as being in need of language development and as having poor social skills.

<sup>4</sup>In some cases, CPP funding may be used to provide extended day services.

References:

Lipkin, P. H., & Macias, M. M. (2019). Promoting Optimal Development: Identifying Infants and Young Children with Developmental Disorders through Developmental Surveillance and Screening. *Pediatrics*, 145(1). DOI: 10.1542/peds.2019-3449

Meisels, S. J., & Atkins-Burnett, S. (2005). *Developmental screening in early childhood, a guide*. (5th ed.).