

# What's working across the Cradle to Career Network

## Outcome: Kindergarten Readiness



**Essential Question:** Are children demonstrating developmental progress across the five learning domains?

**Indicator:** Access to Early Intervention Screening

### Impact

Early childhood is a critical period for brain development, shaping a child's ability to succeed in school and beyond. Identifying developmental, sensory and behavioral concerns early ensures that children can access the services they need before they enter kindergarten. Developmental screenings provide an essential opportunity to connect children to early intervention, which can improve academic and long-term outcomes.

StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network members, including **Waterbury Bridge to Success**, **Stamford Cradle to Career**, **Bridgeport Prospers** and **Norwalk ACTS** in Connecticut, are leading efforts to increase access to developmental screenings and early intervention services. By expanding screening availability and working across sectors, these communities are ensuring that more children receive the support they need to be ready for kindergarten.

### The Landscape

Developmental screenings play a critical role in helping children access the support they need to reach developmental milestones and start kindergarten ready to learn. However, access to these screenings is uneven. According to the National Survey of Children's Health, only 31% of children ages 9 to 35 months received developmental screenings in 2016–2017. White children and those from economically advantaged families were more likely to be screened than children of color or those from lower-income backgrounds. These disparities contribute to gaps in kindergarten readiness and long-term educational outcomes. Closing them is essential to helping more children stay on a path to economic mobility.

Children may receive developmental screenings through several systems, but no single system captures enough data to fully measure access or impact. State Pre-K programs are required to screen children for vision, hearing, and developmental concerns and provide referrals when needed. Head Start programs have similar screening requirements. Pediatricians may also conduct screenings or developmental assessments during routine checkups, although this is not required.

# Indicator and Evidence-Based Practices

**Indicator:** Access to Early Intervention Screening

**Why it matters:** Kindergarten readiness strongly predicts academic success from elementary through high school (National Center for Education Statistics). Research from the American Academy of Pediatrics shows that engagement in kindergarten classrooms is consistently linked to positive high school outcomes—such as graduation, school connectedness, and even physical activity levels.

Early screening for developmental, sensory, and behavioral concerns ensures that children who need support are identified early and connected to services—giving them the best chance to start school ready to learn.

## Evidence-Based Practices:

- **Increasing Developmental Screening:** Cradle to Career Network members are working across health care, early childhood education and community-based settings to expand access to developmental screenings. **Waterbury Bridge to Success** collaborates with schools, child care centers and community organizations to provide Ages & Stages Questionnaires (ASQ) screenings in locations where families already receive services, increasing the percentage of children assessed as developmentally on track from 38% in 2022 to 47% in 2023. **Bridgeport Prospers** trains pediatric providers on the importance of developmental screenings and integrates screenings into routine check-ups, ensuring that developmental concerns are identified early. **Stamford Cradle to Career** partners with early childhood providers to standardize screening efforts across multiple settings, helping to ensure all children receive consistent assessments. **Norwalk ACTS** links screening data to long-term academic outcomes, using insights from longitudinal studies to improve screening strategies and resource allocation.
- **Engaging Families in Early Intervention:** Families play a critical role in supporting early childhood development, and Cradle to Career Network members are working to ensure parents and caregivers have the knowledge, tools and resources they need to navigate the screening process.

**Norwalk ACTS** supports Early Childhood Community Advocates to provide direct outreach to families, educating them on developmental milestones and guiding them through the ASQ screening process using the Sparkler app. **Waterbury Bridge to Success** trains community advocates to lead workshops on the importance of early screenings, helping families understand how early intervention can support their child's success. **Bridgeport Prospers** engages parent ambassadors to host community conversations and gather feedback from families to improve early childhood programming, ensuring that interventions are aligned with parent and community needs.

## • Leveraging Technology to Expand Access:

Technology is playing a key role in increasing access to developmental screenings and connecting families to early intervention services. The Sparkler app allows families to complete ASQ screenings digitally, track their child's developmental progress and receive personalized resources. **Bridgeport Prospers** has promoted the use of Sparkler across their early childhood initiatives, reaching over 5,400 families and contributing to a 37% increase in completed ASQs. **Connecticut's Office of Early Childhood** provides Sparkler free to all families with children ages 0-5, ensuring that developmental screening tools are accessible statewide. By integrating technology into their early childhood strategies, network members are making it easier for families to monitor their child's development and access critical support services.

## Looking Ahead

By embedding developmental screenings into education, health care and community systems, Cradle to Career Network members in Connecticut are ensuring that more children receive early intervention services and enter kindergarten ready to learn. Through continued collaboration, family engagement and innovative technology solutions, these efforts will help close gaps in early childhood development and set more children on a path to academic success and long-term economic mobility.