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Our Turn: The importance of developmental screening

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Developmental screening of young children provides critical information on how children are doing as they grow. Like a yardstick for measuring height, developmental screening is a tool that helps families measure important areas of their children's development through the early years.

Early brain research confirms that brains are built over time, and "from the bottom up," with simple circuits and skills providing the foundation for learning more complex skills. As such, the sooner developmental concerns are identified, the sooner children and parents can get the support they need to maximize their children's potential.

In New Hampshire, one out of every five New Hampshire children under the age of 5 are at risk of developmental or behavioral concerns. Unfortunately, most of New Hampshire's children do not receive standardized screening for developmental or behavioral concerns. As a result, some children with delays do not have access to the early identification and services that are so critical to their development.

Identifying and intervening early to address developmental delays in young children can help prevent additional problems. In some cases, this is as simple as helping a child with a speech problem that might otherwise keep him or her from playing with other children and/or succeeding in school. Intervening early can prevent or minimize the need for costly special education services.

Every child deserves the chance to enter school ready to learn. Ensuring that all children are screened for developmental concerns and receive the services needed to promote their optimal development is an important part of ensuring success for our state's littlest learners.

Concord School District enthusiastically supports young children and their families by offering developmental screenings throughout the year. For example, children who are entering kindergarten participate in a screening process. For children birth to age 5, screenings are offered

throughout the year through the Concord Developmental Preschool Program, at the district Child Check programs and at the four Family Center programs. Additionally, many Concord child care and preschool programs offer developmental screening as part of their programs. Families are encouraged to share their knowledge about their child's unique strengths and needs.

Working together, parents and early childhood professionals can celebrate a child's strengths and address any developmental concerns that are raised during the screening process. Together, we hope to help each child experience success as they begin their journey of growth and learning.

(Stacey Lazzar is the project manager and Laurie Hart the early childhood coordinator of the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Grant Initiative, which is dedicated to creating safe and supportive schools and communities through the building of partnerships among educational, behavioral health and criminal/juvenile justice systems.)