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Catherine P. McDowell: Screening for children

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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 supports they need to maximize their children's potential.

In New Hampshire, one out of every five 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/her from playing with other children and/or succeeding in school. Intervening early can prevent or minimize the need for costly special education services.

The start of a new school year is a powerful reminder that 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 the state's youngest students.

In Coos County, the Coos Coalition for Young Children and Families has been coordinating and tracking developmental screening for children ages 0-5 throughout the county. Parents can receive a free developmental screen for their child from any childcare center in Coos County, as well as at the Family Resource Center, Northern Human Services, Head Start, Coos County Family Health Services, Indian Stream Health Center or Weeks Medical Center. In the past six months 24 percent of all children in Coos have received a developmental screen and 4 percent of those screened were referred for further assessment for a developmental delay.

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