

The Keene Sentinel

Early screening a vital part of children's development, by Joe Parisi and Kathy Harrington

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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 is 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.

At Impact Monadnock, work is underway to improve the overall well-being of the Monadnock Region by investing in children ages 0-5 and their families. A key component of Impact Monadnock's strategic plan is to integrate developmental screening into medical well-child visits for children with an emphasis on social and emotional screening. Approximately 60 percent of Monadnock Region children aren't being screened on a regular basis or not being screened at all. Clearly, this is a concern because developmental issues, including social and emotional issues, aren't being identified for early intervention supports and 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.

Sincerely,

JOE PARISI

Chairman,

Impact Monadnock Board of Directors

and

KATHY HARRINGTON

President,

Monadnock United Way

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(also for for Ken Jue, vice chair, board of the Monadnock United Way; Laura Milliken, director of Spark NH; and Marjorie Droppa, project director of Impact Monadnock)