

Developmental Screening in Mississippi Child Care Centers



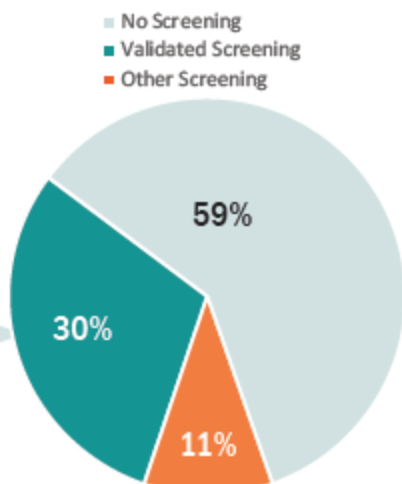
Critical elements of school readiness for young children include achieving physical, social, and emotional developmental milestones^[1] and failure to achieve certain milestones could indicate a developmental delay. Screening for developmental delay can take place in a number of venues. Given that a large proportion of young children in Mississippi are in some form of licensed out of home care, child care centers provide an optimal setting for conducting developmental screening. However, there are currently no universally accepted standards or regulations for how childcare centers should screen children for developmental delays. According to the most recent guidelines, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends at least 3 comprehensive developmental screenings in the first 5 years of a child's life (at 9, 18, and 30 months, or whenever a parent expresses a concern). Autism screening is recommended at ages 18 and 24 months.^[2] Federal guidelines regarding developmental screenings in childcare centers are relatively sparse, leaving the burden of program development on the states. Consequently, few states have created initiatives to improve screening rates through

this channel. Most state initiatives are run by the Department of Health (which is the regulatory agency for child care) and focus on pediatricians and primary care providers, rather than educators. However, there are advantages to administering developmental screens in childcare settings; the Department of Education or overseeing body can determine best practices and ensure standardization, provide incentives for centers that demonstrate improved screening rates, and incorporate screening results into education plans. To better understand the status of developmental screenings in Mississippi child care centers, a survey of child care center administrators was conducted between January and March 2018 by the Family and Children Research Unit via the Wolfgang Frese Survey Research Laboratory at MSU's Social Science Research Center. The total sampling frame included 1,533 licensed child care centers as drawn from the American Academy of Pediatrics database of child care facilities and the Mississippi Department of Health's Child Care Licensure Database. Data collection was conducted using a census approach in lieu of sampling. The survey response rate was 52% (n=791).

Child Care Centers by Screening Status

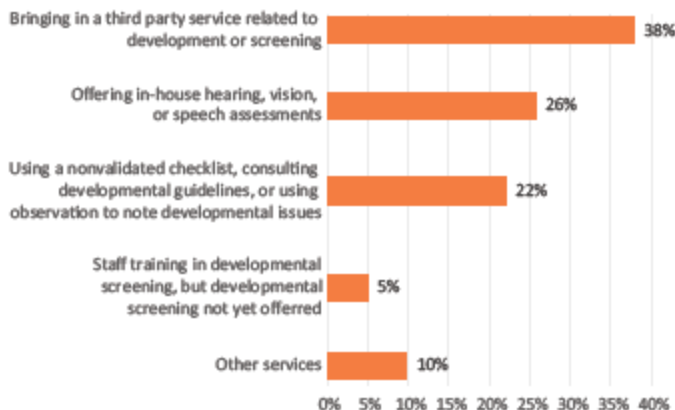
Among surveyed childcare centers, 30% reported using at least one validated developmental screening instrument to screen children. A validated screening instrument is a standardized guide for developmental screening that is clinically tested and evidence-based. An additional 11% reported using another, non-validated type of developmental screening in their centers. The majority of centers, 59%, reported not offering any form of developmental screening.

Of the 30% of centers using validated screenings, 81 centers (35%) are Head Start Centers. This is 10% of all surveyed centers. Head Start centers are required by Head Start policy to offer screenings. The remaining 153 surveyed centers that offer validated screenings (20% of all centers) do so voluntarily.



Eleven percent of centers reported offering screening services related to development, but not conducting in-house validated developmental screenings. Services offered by these 82 centers are illustrated in the graph to the left.

Other Screening Services



September
2018