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Implementing Screening in Mississippi Pre-Kindergarten Programs
Study reveals 52 percent of children screened are developmentally “on-target” for kindergarten

JACKSON—Just over half (52 percent) of Mississippi four year olds receiving developmental screenings as part of a newly-released study of children enrolled in the state’s pre-kindergarten programs were considered developmentally ready for their kindergarten year. Nearly one quarter (24 percent) of children were in need of further evaluation by a health care professional, and another quarter (24 percent) were in need of “monitoring” for the possibility of more assessments.

The Center for Mississippi Health Policy (C4MHP) contracted with Mississippi KIDS COUNT, located at Mississippi State University’s Social Science Research Center (SSRC) to analyze results of the developmental screenings conducted in each of the 11 state-funded collaborative pre-kindergarten programs located across the state. In cooperation with the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE), approximately 1,350 of the 1,786 four year olds enrolled in the programs were screened in fall 2014 using the Ages and States Questionnaire Third Edition (ASQ-3) and the Ages and Stages Questionnaire Social Emotional (ASQ-SE), two widely recognized instruments with high levels of validity and reliability. The ASQ-SE measures behavioral areas such as compliance, communication, and interaction with people. Almost one out of every five (18.9 percent) of the children screened using the ASQ-SE fell into the “referral” range.

“Developmental screenings such as the Ages and States Questionnaire provide a standardized way to evaluate children to determine if they are growing physically, mentally, emotionally and socially at an appropriate pace prior to their kindergarten year,” said Linda Southward, Mississippi KIDS COUNT director. “These screenings can help to identify possible developmental delays, which if detected early, can be more easily resolved and can place a child on a very different trajectory for academic success.”

Risk factors associated with developmental delay include poverty, minority status, low-parental education, and low birthweight. “These risk factors are particularly relevant to Mississippi, yet only 18 percent of Mississippi children are screened before age six,” said Therese Hanna, Executive Director of the Center for Mississippi Health Policy. “Several states have implemented policies to ensure children are screened as recommended by the Academy of Pediatrics and have seen considerable success.”

The full report can be found at www.mshealthpolicy.com and at www.kidscount.ssrc.msstate.edu. The Center for Mississippi Health Policy has also produced an issue brief “Childhood Development: Implementing Screening in Mississippi Pre-Kindergarten Programs” which focuses on the overall screening study and outlines policy considerations. Mississippi KIDS COUNT has produced a brief, “Countdown to Kindergarten: The Impact of Social and Emotional Development on Academic Success” that examines the findings from the ASQ-SE screenings. Both briefs can be found on the respective websites (www.mshealthpolicy.com and www.kidscount.ssrc.msstate.edu).

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The mission of the Center for Mississippi Health Policy is to serve as a catalyst for health policy debate, providing information to policymakers and the general public and communicating research findings that will stimulate dialogue and inform decision-making. Mississippi KIDS COUNT is a part of the national KIDS COUNT network of state-based organizations supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The work is carried out through the Family and Children Research Unit, a division of Mississippi State University’s Social Science Research Center.