

How Can we Help Every Child in Connecticut Get a Strong Start?

sparkler

Help Me Grow National Forum Presentation
September 22, 2021



Introductions

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Agenda

1. Connecticut's Help Me Grow Story
2. Sparkler Introduction & Demo
 - a. Family Experience
 - b. Provider Experience
3. Pilot Lessons
4. Scaling Impact in Connecticut
 - a. Growing partnerships
 - b. Growing impact
 - c. Funding
 - d. Continued support
5. Discussion

1. Connecticut's Help Me Grow Story

Help Me Grow in CT



Help Me Grow launched in Connecticut as a pilot in Hartford (originally called ChildServ) in the late 1990s.

1997

The 1st iPhone was introduced in 2007 and 1st Android smartphone was introduced in 2008 -- changing the way many families accessed info and engaged.

2007-09

Help Me Grow CT Advisory Committee launched as an outgrowth of our ECCS (early childhood comprehensive systems) work.

2016

1995

ASQ® first published and used in Connecticut



2002

Help Me Grow CT became a statewide program, part of the Children's Trust Fund. The parent access point: 211 established.



2013

Governor Malloy signed Public Act 14-39, establishing the Office of Early childhood to create a cohesive, high quality early childhood system.



2019

Sparkler introduced in CT as a pilot to support HMG and early childhood systems building in the state, Expanding statewide this year.



2. Sparkler Introduction & Demo

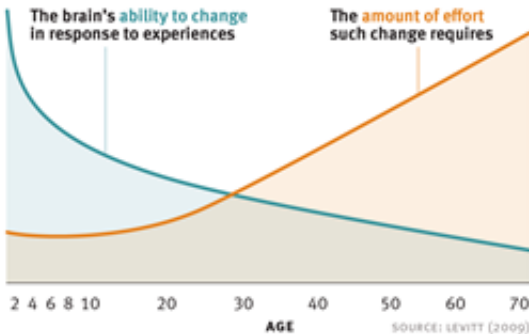
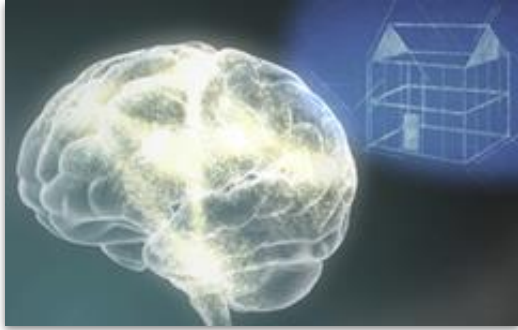
Big Picture Goal

sparkler empowers parents and caregivers as first teachers and helps systems serve families better, together.

Today: Help YOU learn the basics about Sparkler and see how it's supporting the work of Help Me Grow in Connecticut.



Why Focus on Early Childhood?



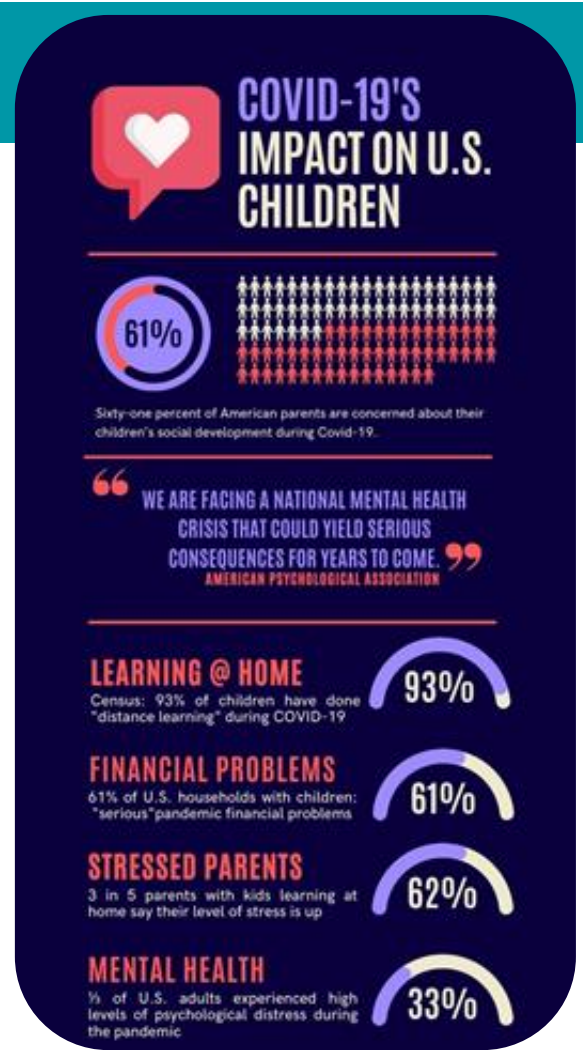
- Brains grow over time.
- Brain architecture starts before birth and continues into adulthood; it's affected by genes and experiences.
- In the first few years of life, more than 1 million new neural connections form every second!
- Parents and caregivers shape children's early experiences which can have positive, long-term impacts on their development.

COVID-19: New Early Learning Needs

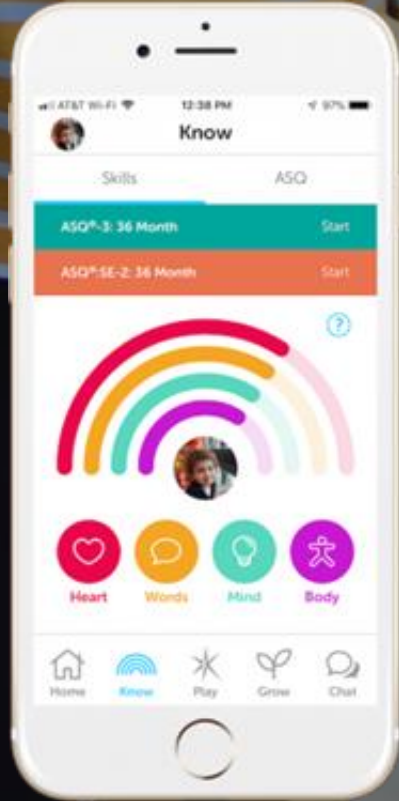
Covid-19 has put additional stress on families with young children, affecting children's wellness and early development.

More than ever, families need:

- Access to high-quality, science-based information to support their children's healthy early development.
- Support from people who can answer questions and offer help.



Today We'll Talk About Sparkler



For families, Sparkler is a mobile app, in English & Spanish, on Android/iOS. Parents get:

1. Developmental screening (ASQ-3 and ASQ:SE-2) to check in on their child's development.
2. A library of 1000+ playful activities created by early childhood educators to help parents and children play together off screen to promote learning.
3. Connection with professionals — 211 Child Development or other professionals.

Schools/providers can use the mobile app to see what families see or sign into the Sparkler Dashboard to monitor and engage with families.

Let's Get You Started with Sparkler's App!

1

Pull out your smartphone or tablet!

2

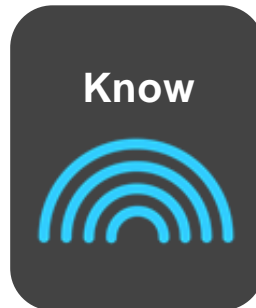
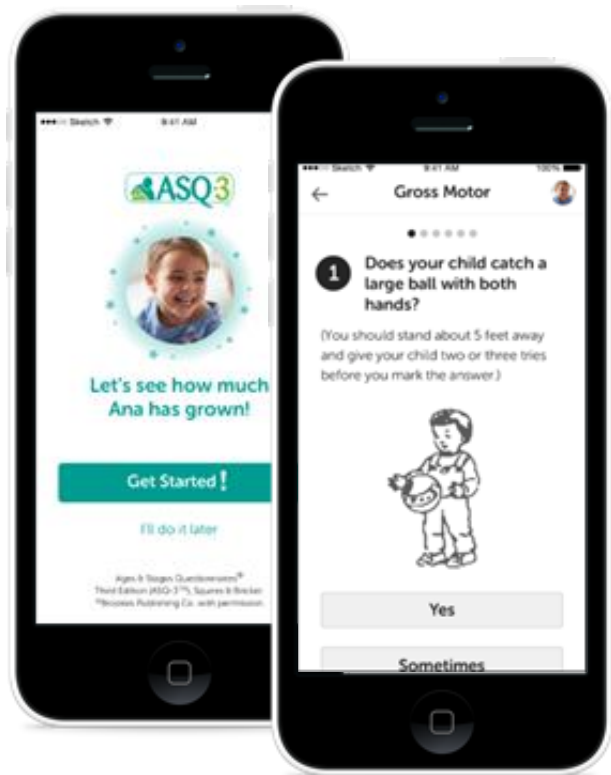
On browser go to this URL and download app: <https://playsparkler.org/get>

3

Press Create a New Account, pick Email, and follow these steps:

- Enter your access code: **CT** or your school/program's unique code
- Enter your email address and make up a password you'll remember
- Create **YOUR** account: Enter your name, phone number, address
- Create a **CHILD PROFILE** for 0-5 yr old (Sparkler assigns content based on Children's ages, so you need a 0-5 year to see **ASQ** and play content, providers can create "pretend" children in order to see what families see): child's first name, last name, pronoun, birthdate, prematurity if under 2, photo if you choose
- Profile Questions, Sponsoring Partners

Follow Along to Learn How to Use the App: Sparkler Makes Screening More Accessible



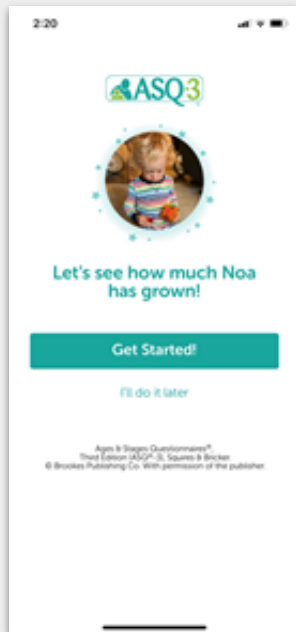
Families can visit **KNOW** to find the mobile Ages and Stages Questionnaires® — both ASQ-3 and ASQ:SE-2. ASQ helps educators, doctors, and families understand children's strengths, set goals, and access support.

Ages & Stages Questionnaires® and ASQ® are registered trademarks of Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc.

Example of Sparkler's Developmental Screening Functionality

Sparkler provides developmental screening (the ASQ-3 and ASQ:SE-2) to families via smartphone or tablet. The following show screenshots from the live app.

Welcome Screen



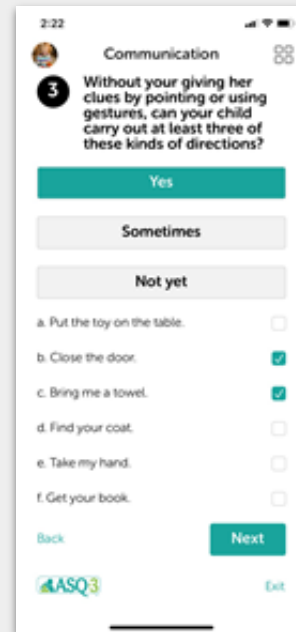
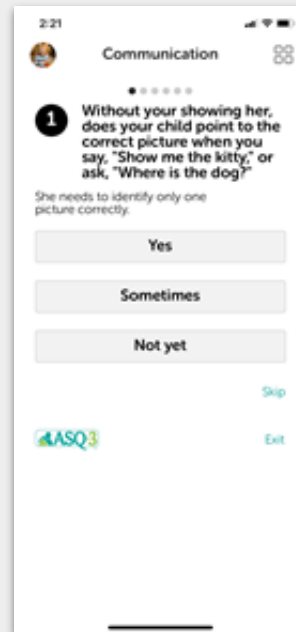
What to Expect



Section Intro



Different types of multiple choice and free response questions

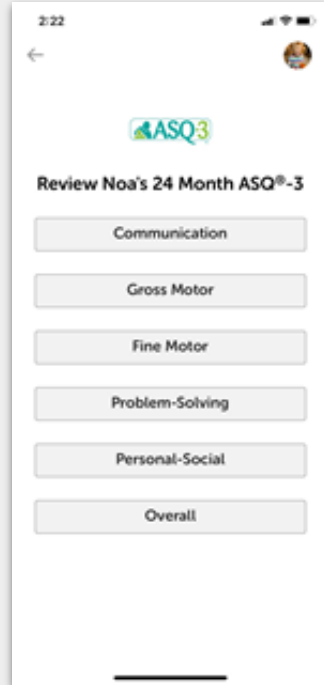


Mobile ASQ, Continued

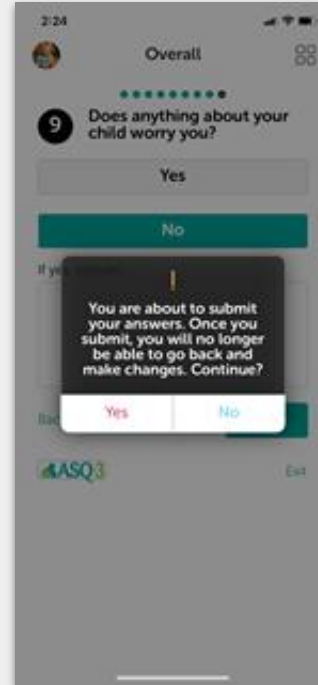
Congrats screen
at end of each
section



Ability to
navigate around
the sections



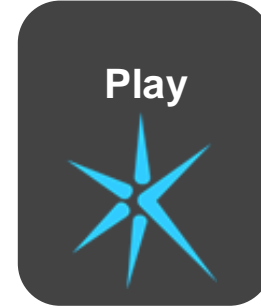
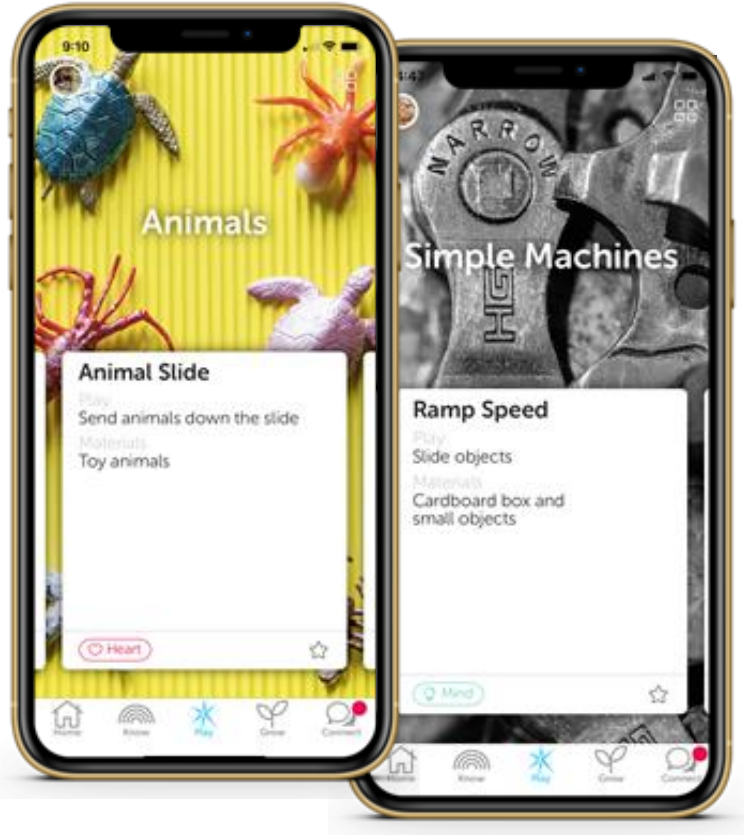
At the end, user
agrees to finish
and submit



Thank you at the end
and link to
play/learning activities



Play: Spark Healthy Early Development Together!

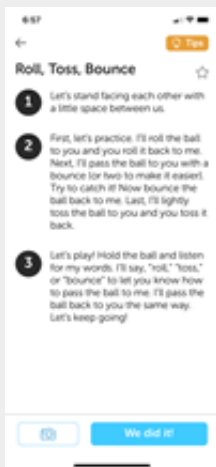


Families can visit **PLAY** to swipe through a library of play-based learning activities to find an activity that sparks their interest or is focused on a skill they want to help their child develop.

Play: Spark Healthy Early Development Together!



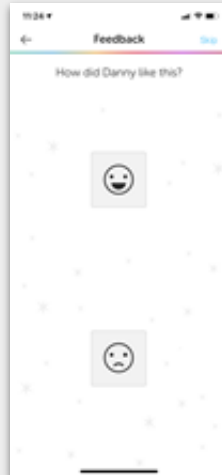
Simple
"recipe"
for
play



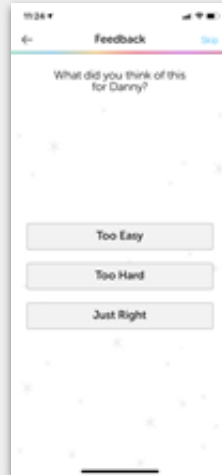
Tips (vocab,
stretch,
simplify,
etc.)



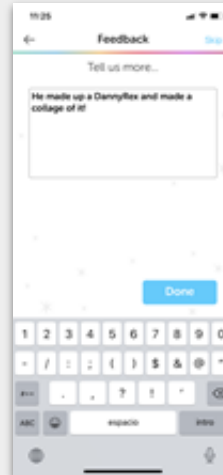
Feedback:
Did the
child like it?



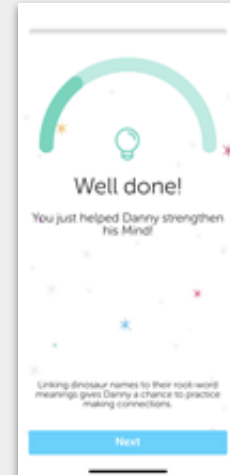
Feedback:
Was the
level right?



Feedback:
Free
Response



Congrats
screen



As Families Play, Sparkler Shows Progress!



As parents and children play, Sparkler helps visualize their accomplishments: How have they grown their child's heart, mind, body, and words? Click on the icons to find more activities in each.

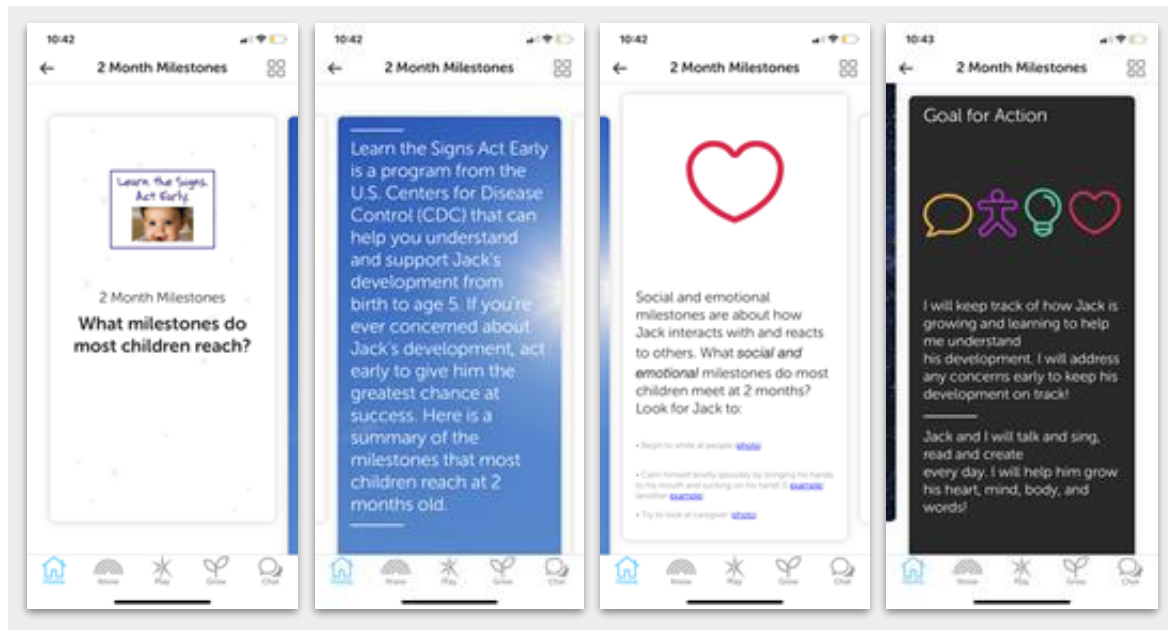
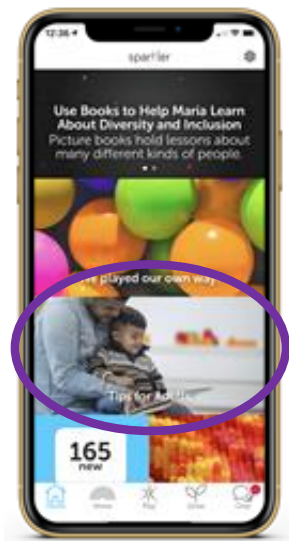
Grow: Remember How Your Child Has Grown



When families take pictures and add feedback they add to their scrapbook — in the **GROW** tab of Sparkler.

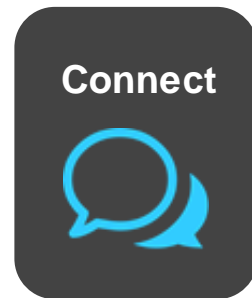


Learn The Signs Act Early and Other Parent Tips



Sparkler also has a library of tips for parents — with simple actionable steps they can use to help their children! This includes summaries of different parenting skills, explanations of the developmental milestones, and adaptations of the *Learn the Signs. Act Early.* milestones from the CDC.

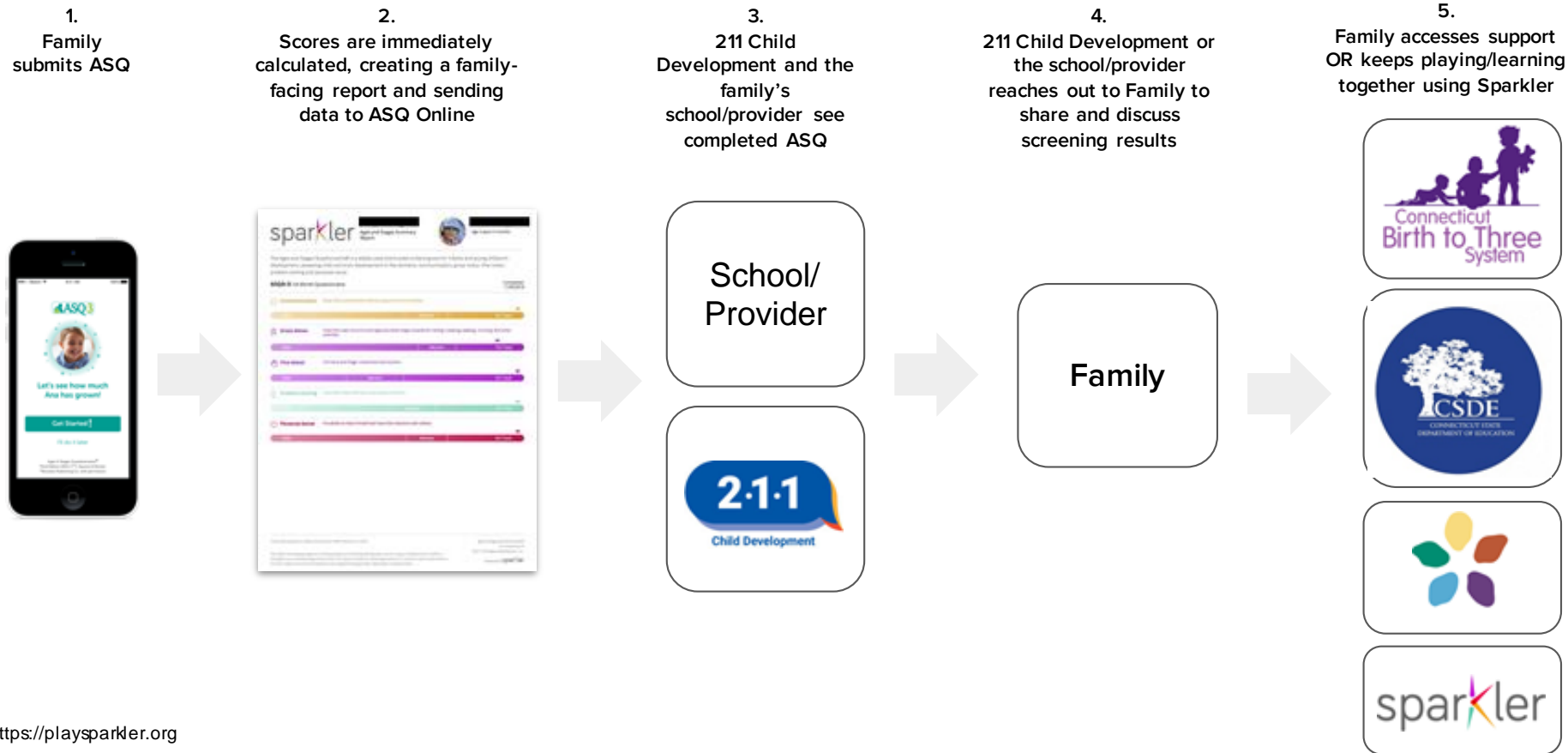
Two-way Coaching and Advice to Connect with Families



Sparkler messages can engage families.

- Parents get nudges about activities, screenings, and important reminders
- Parents can get answers from 211 Child Development care coordinators or their programs/providers
- Members of a child's team (e.g., mom and grandma) can send notes to each other via Sparkler

When a CT Family Takes the ASQ on Sparkler



A Network of Support for CT Families



Sparkler Learning
(Office of Early
Childhood)



211 Child Development
(Formerly "CDI," United Way
of CT / 2-1-1)



Birth to Three,
IDEA Part C
(Office of Early
Childhood)



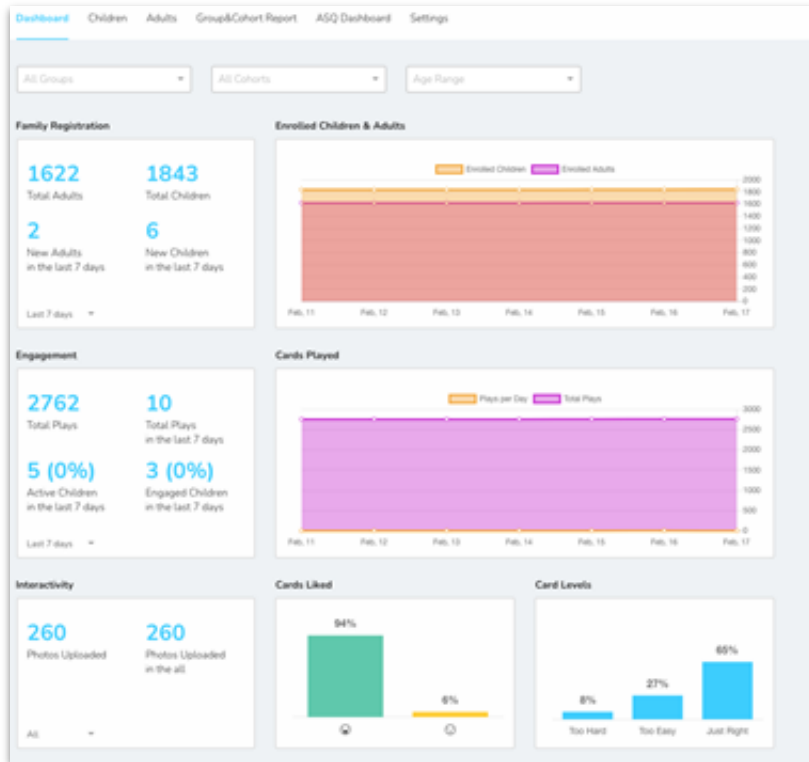
CT State
Department of
Education (Early
Childhood Special
Education)



CT Help Me Grow
(Office of Early
Childhood)

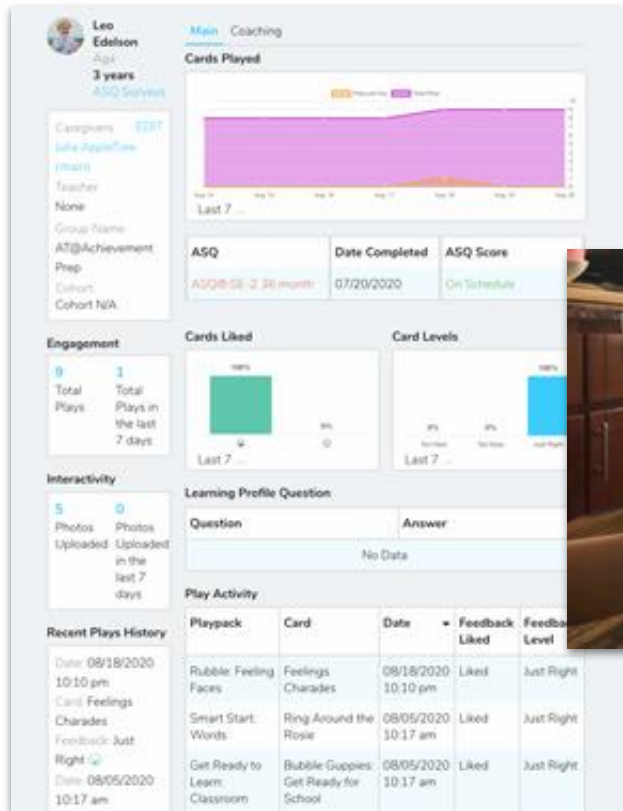
Sparkler helps families tap into a whole network of supports and services in CT.

Understand the Dashboard: Main Screen



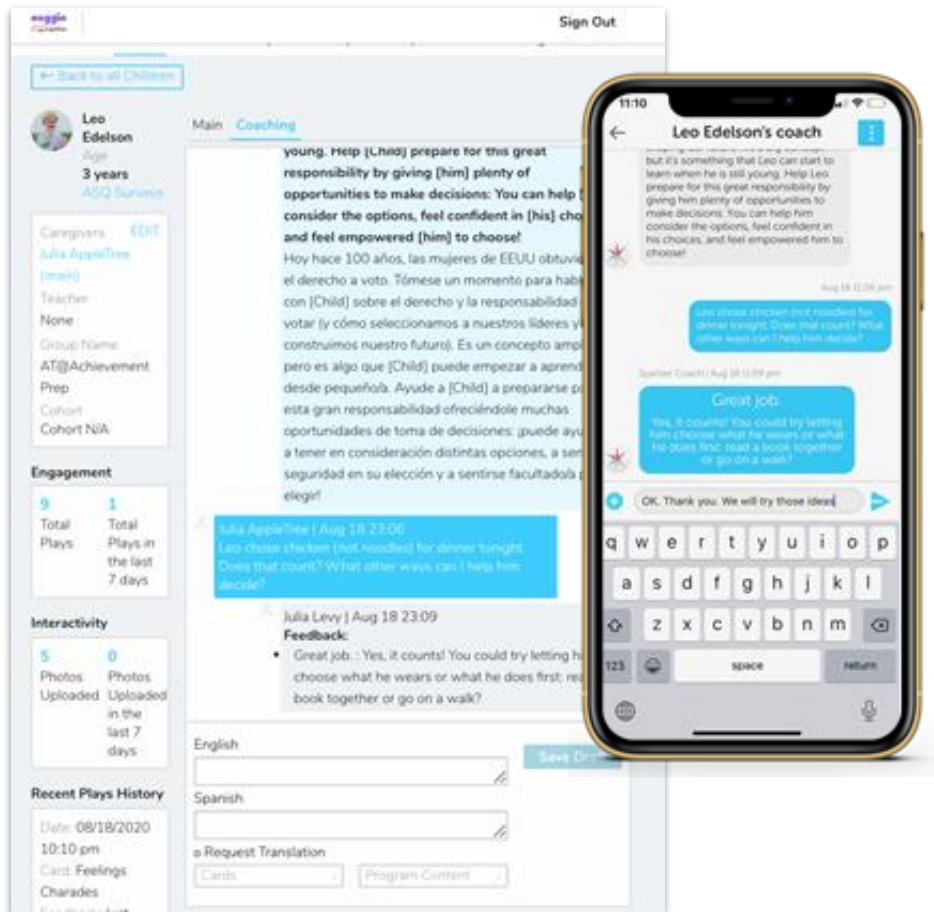
Main Dashboard view
provides activity summary

Understand the Dashboard: Child Page

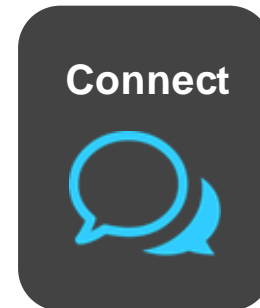


Child view shows individual-level activity — screenings completed and other engagement

Two-way Coaching and Advice to Connect with Families

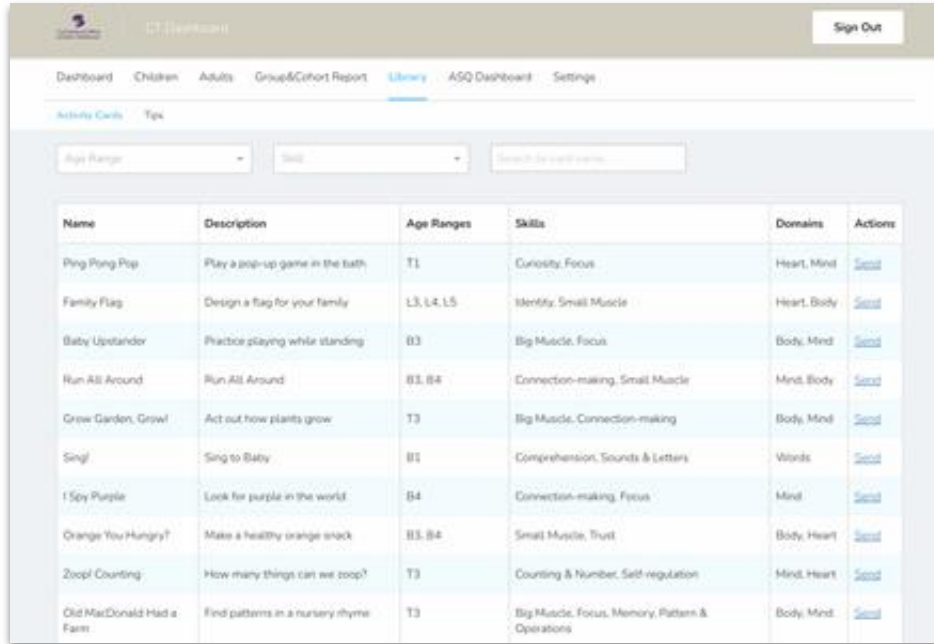


The image displays the Sparkler dashboard on the left and a smartphone on the right. The dashboard shows a profile for Leo Edelson, a 3-year-old child, with a 'Main Coaching' section. The coaching text reads: "young. Help [Leo] prepare for this great responsibility by giving [him] plenty of opportunities to make decisions. You can help consider the options, feel confident in [his] choices and feel empowered [him] to choose! Hoy hace 100 años, las mujeres de EEUU obtuvieron el derecho a voto. Tómese un momento para hablar con [Child] sobre el derecho y la responsabilidad de votar (y cómo seleccionamos a nuestros líderes y construimos nuestro futuro). Es un concepto amplio pero es algo que [Child] puede empezar a aprender desde pequeña. Ayude a [Child] a prepararse para esta gran responsabilidad ofreciéndole muchas oportunidades de toma de decisiones: puede ayudar a tener en consideración distintas opciones, a sentirse seguro en su elección y a sentirse facultado a elegir!" Below this, a message from Julia AppleTree asks, "Leo chose a chicken (not hoodie) for dinner tonight. Does that count? What other ways can I help him decide?". A response from Julia Levy says, "Great job! Yes, it counts! You could try letting him choose what he wears or what he does first, read a book together or go on a walk." The smartphone shows the same coaching session, with the text translated into Spanish: "Leo chose a chicken (not hoodie) for dinner tonight. Does that count? What other ways can I help him decide?" and the response: "Great job! Yes, it counts! You could try letting him choose what he wears or what he does first, read a book together or go on a walk." The phone screen also shows a keyboard and a 'Save Draft' button.



You can use the dashboard to stay connected! Send messages back and forth with families!

Understand the Dashboard: Library

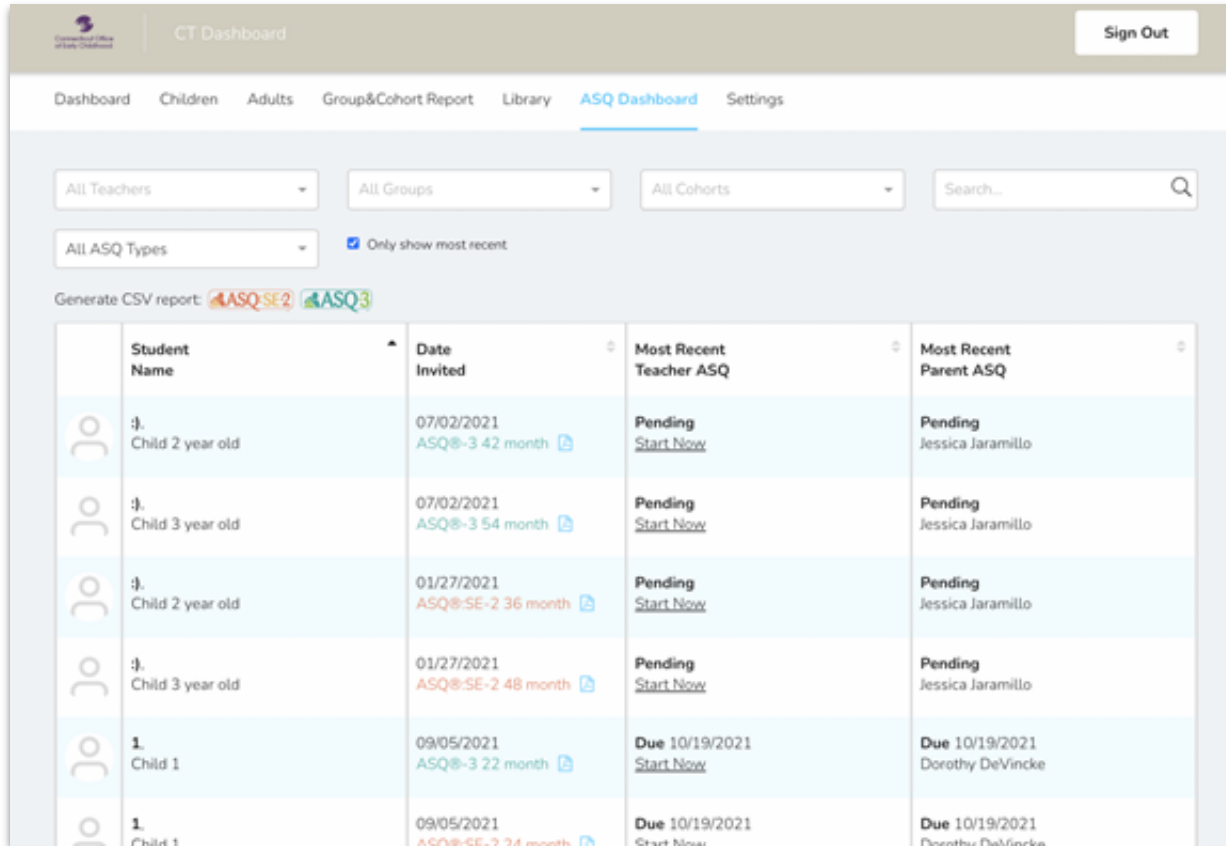


The screenshot shows the Sparkler dashboard's Library page. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Dashboard', 'Children', 'Adults', 'Group&Cohort Report', 'Library' (selected), 'ASQ Dashboard', and 'Settings'. Below the navigation is a search bar with 'Age Range' and 'Skill' dropdowns, and a search input field. The main content is a table of activities.

Name	Description	Age Ranges	Skills	Domains	Actions
Ping Pong Pop	Play a pop-up game in the bath	T1	Curiosity, Focus	Heart, Mind	Share
Family Flag	Design a flag for your family	L3, L4, L5	Identify, Small Muscle	Heart, Body	Share
Baby Upstander	Practice playing while standing	03	Big Muscle, Focus	Body, Mind	Share
Run All Around	Run All Around	03, 04	Connection-making, Small Muscle	Mind, Body	Share
Grow Garden, Grow!	Act out how plants grow	T3	Big Muscle, Connection-making	Body, Mind	Share
Sing!	Sing to Baby	01	Comprehension, Sounds & Letters	Winds	Share
I Spy Purple	Look for purple in the world	04	Connection-making, Focus	Mind	Share
Orange You Hungry?	Make a healthy orange snack	03, 04	Small Muscle, Trust	Body, Heart	Share
Zoo! Counting	How many things can we coop?	T3	Counting & Number, Self-regulation	Mind, Heart	Share
Old MacDonald Had a Farm	Find patterns in a nursery rhyme	T3	Big Muscle, Focus, Memory, Pattern & Operations	Body, Mind	Share

Use the Library to find and share activities or parent tips with families

Understand the Dashboard: Screening



The screenshot shows the 'ASQ Dashboard' interface. At the top, there's a 'Sign Out' button. Below it, a navigation bar includes 'Dashboard', 'Children', 'Adults', 'Group&Cohort Report', 'Library', 'ASQ Dashboard' (highlighted), and 'Settings'. A filter section contains dropdowns for 'All Teachers', 'All Groups', 'All Cohorts', and 'All ASQ Types', along with a search bar and a checked checkbox for 'Only show most recent'. Below the filters, there are links for 'Generate CSV report' and 'ASQ SE 2' and 'ASQ 3'. The main content is a table with the following data:

	Student Name	Date Invited	Most Recent Teacher ASQ	Most Recent Parent ASQ
	Child 2 year old	07/02/2021 ASQ@-3 42 month	Pending Start Now	Pending Jessica Jaramillo
	Child 3 year old	07/02/2021 ASQ@-3 54 month	Pending Start Now	Pending Jessica Jaramillo
	Child 2 year old	01/27/2021 ASQ@SE-2 36 month	Pending Start Now	Pending Jessica Jaramillo
	Child 3 year old	01/27/2021 ASQ@SE-2 48 month	Pending Start Now	Pending Jessica Jaramillo
	1. Child 1	09/05/2021 ASQ@-3 22 month	Due 10/19/2021 Start Now	Due 10/19/2021 Dorothy DeVincke
	1. Child 1	09/05/2021 ASQ@SE-2 24 month	Due 10/19/2021 Start Now	Due 10/19/2021 Dorothy DeVincke

Do facilitated screenings, analyze results, download reports, and more.

Facilitated Screening Available on the Dashboard

← Exit Survey

Nea L.
ASQ-3 24 month

ASQ-3

Communication

Gross Motor

Fine Motor

Problem-Solving

Personal-Social

Overall

Communication

1 Without your showing her, does your child point to the correct picture when you say, "Show me the kitty," or ask, "Where is the dog?"
She needs to identify only one picture correctly.

Yes

Sometimes

Not yet

2 Does your child imitate a two-word sentence?
For example, when you say a two-word phrase, such as "Mama eat," "Daddy play," "Go home," or "What's this?" does your child say both words back to you? (Mark "yes" even if her words are difficult to understand.)

Yes

Sometimes

Not yet

3 Without your giving her clues by pointing or using gestures, can your child carry out at least three of these kinds of directions?

a. Put the toy on the table.

b. Close the door.

c. Bring me a towel.

d. Find your coat.

e. Take my hand.

f. Get your book.

Yes

Sometimes

Not yet

4 If you point to a picture of a ball (kitty, cup, hat, etc.) and ask your child, "What is this?" does your child correctly name at least one picture?

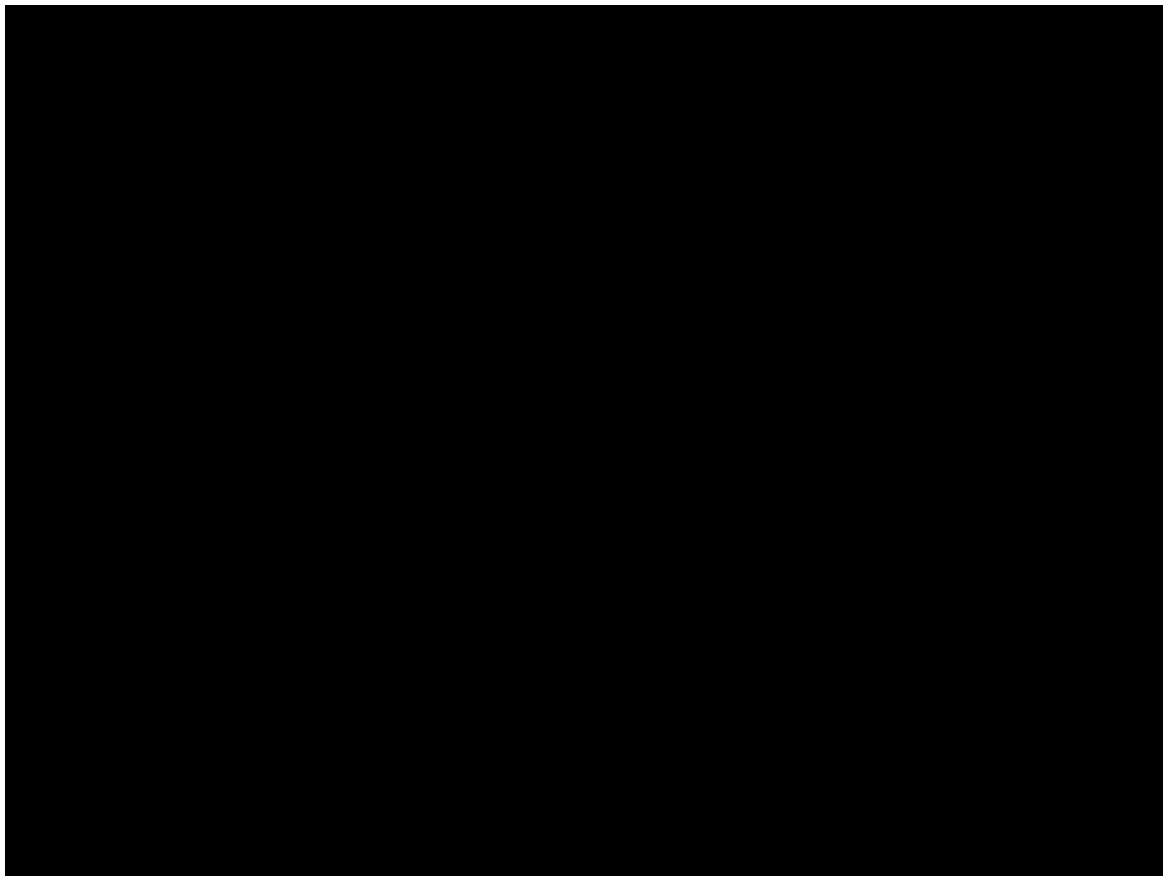
Yes

Sometimes

Not yet

Sparkler enables teachers, school-based coaches, home visitors, or other providers to use a web-based dashboard to complete screenings of children.

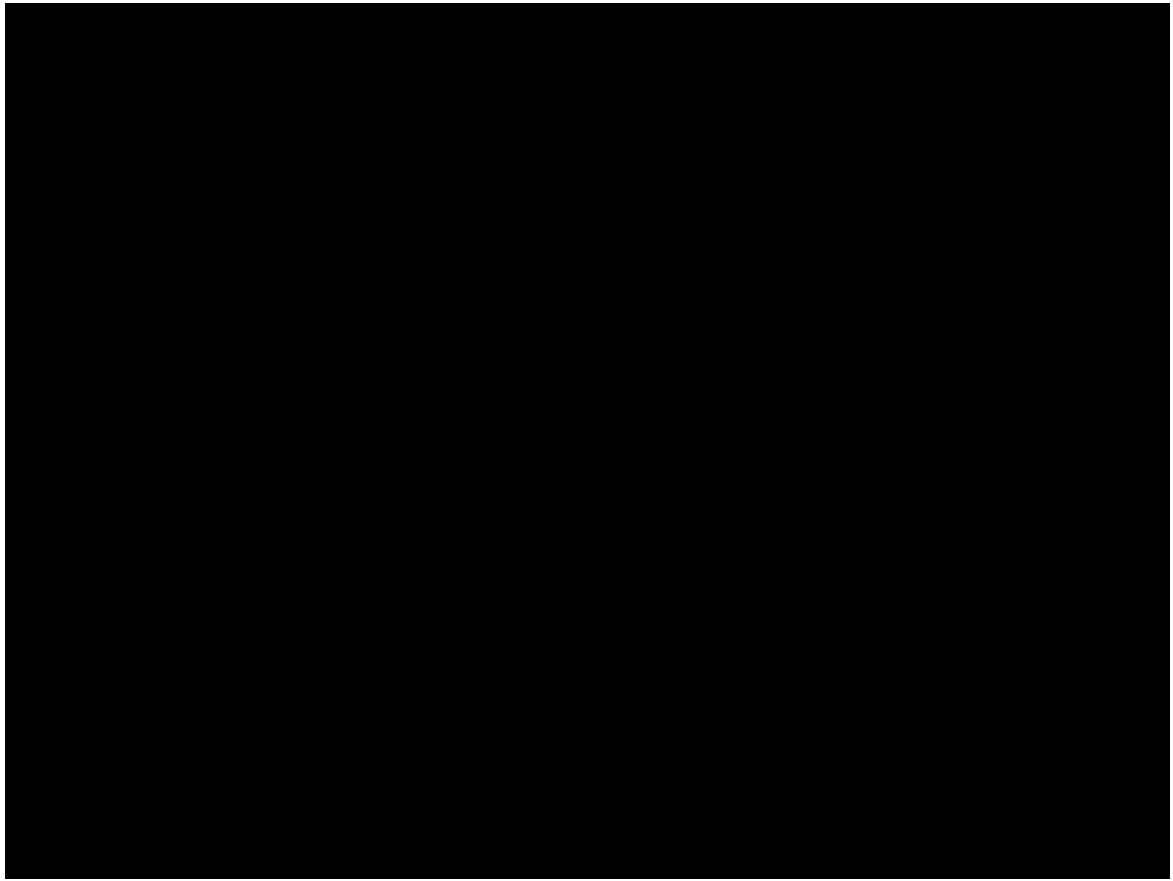
Helping CT Parents Parent



Janice Rivera

Hartford, CT Mother

Provider Experience



Gay Firth

Karene Reid-Oriabor

**East Shore District
Health Department**

3. Lessons from The Pilot

Positive Feedback from Families & Providers

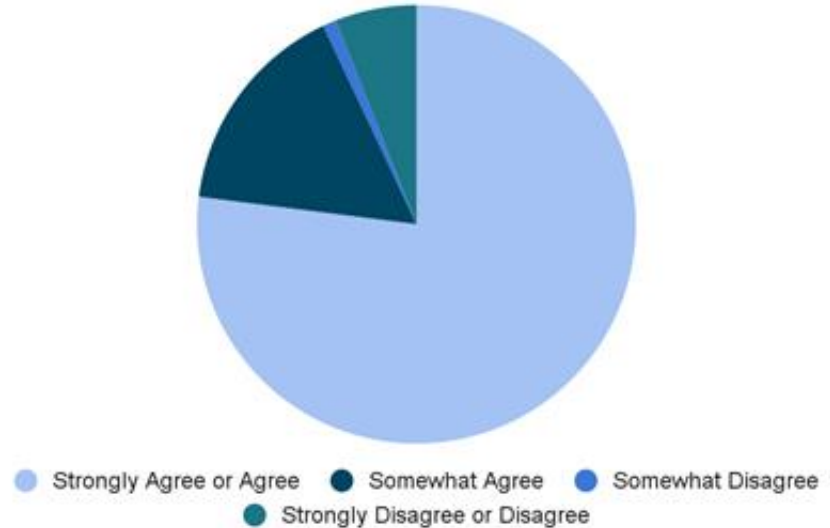
Positive feedback from families.

77% of parents “strongly agree” or “agree” that Sparkler benefits their family.

“Sparkler es una aplicación sumamente beneficiosa para los padres”

(Sparkler is an extremely beneficial app for parents) [translated from Spanish]

Parents' agreement with the statement: "The Sparkler App Benefits My Family"



Positive Feedback from Families

Parent participants of the 5 focus groups who used both the paper and Sparkler App ASQ versions generally preferred the app version for its convenience, mobility, and ability to connect quickly if a delay was identified.

“It was a great advocacy tool to just be able to confirm what I was seeing...the delay in speech. And at first being like, “Oh, okay, he’s in monitor this month.” And then the next one, it came up as refer. And I’m like, “Okay, yeah, now, it’s really time to make some movement. I can actually say what I was thinking is real. I can go bring proof to someone and show them that this is what’s happening.”

Positive Feedback About 211's Support

“I was corresponding with [staff] at the CDI. And we went back and forth, a bunch of times, and she was very patient because I didn't always respond right away. But she helped with the areas of, like, “monitor” and “refer,” and what resources to use for what. She connected me with the Child First Program. She connected me with the parent advocacy group that helps with special education. So I found out that, like other people were saying, the coach, I really thought it was a robot, so I didn't respond at all. But having a person emailing me and really individualizing the response to me, I found that really helpful.”

Positive Feedback from Providers

Providers who participated in the pilot said that the purpose of Sparkler is multi- faceted:

- Added resource for tracking child development in the community and for encouraging school readiness;
- Increase parent understanding of child development;
- Increase developmental screenings (ASQ) and early interventions;
- Many providers said Sparkler and the ASQ helped them boost the confidence of parents as “first teachers” and advocates for their children; and
- Providers said it helped to boost family engagement.

Providers said that the ASQ was not just a screening tool, but an educational one — a communication tool that provides a common language and points of discussion about child development for parents and their providers.

Areas for Improvement

- **Encouraging ongoing play** — helping families make play part of their daily lives.
- **Providing more training and more ongoing support.**
- **Building connections** — not just parent-to-provider but parent to parent to provider. There are many people in communities working together to support families, and we want to build those connections.
- **Data** — do more to build connections across diverse datasets in the state, supporting evaluation, helping to identify gaps. This will guide quality improvement.
- **Healthcare** — so far, Sparkler has been primarily in the “education” space in CT. We’re working to build bridges with pediatricians/healthcare going forward.

4. Scaling Impact in CT

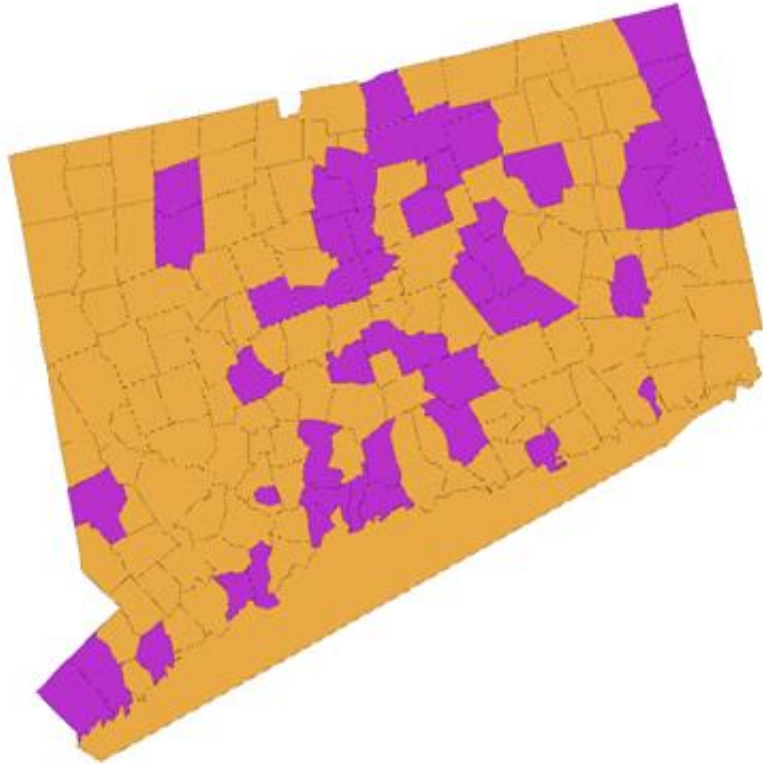
Sparkler's Early Pilots in Connecticut



The Initial OEC Sparkler Initiative: A pilot with a group of Early Care and other providers to improve developmental screening, communication, and promotion with families. Reach of pilot:

- **Early Childhood Center Based and Family Day Care:** Hartford and Bridgeport
- **Preschool Development Grant (PDG) Expansion:** 6 Communities — Bristol, Danbury, Manchester, New Haven, Stamford, Waterbury
- **CT OEC Home Visitors:** 44 Home Visiting Programs statewide

A Tool for All CT Families With 0-5 Year Olds



Starting this year, Sparkler is working with OEC and its partners across the state to serve all families of CT children 0-5 years old and programs serving those families.

So far in 2021, serving ~50 communities + all OEC Home Visiting + various other pilots

Building Bridges in Early Childhood

Sparkler has been deepening integrations within OEC and across different agencies in CT to support families. Our goal: forming an integrated system of support for CT providers and families. This includes:

OEC partnerships:

- Home visiting — training new Home Visitors, building API to integrate with HV's ECIS system
- Birth to Three
- Early childhood programs
- Early conversations about integrating the parent-facing components of CT DOTS/CT ELDS + Pyramid Model

Collaborations with other State agencies:

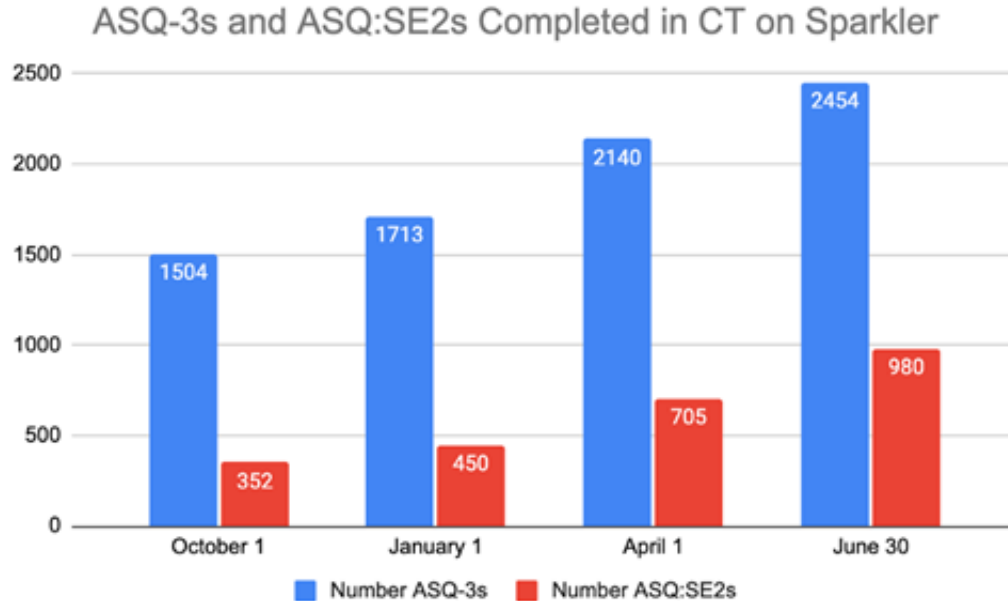
- DCF — region 4 pilot with hopes of a statewide launch
- SDE outreach to all districts via Child Find
- Early talks with healthcare providers

Building connections across the state:

- 211 Child Development = core partner / Help Me Grow
- School Readiness Councils
- CT Children's Collective
- Learn the Signs. Act Early.
- Family Resource Centers



Increased Screenings



Increase in screenings this year. The number of ASQ:SEs completed using Sparkler has almost tripled since January 1 — from 450 to more than 1,320.

In the last 6 months, 850+ ASQ-3s and 700+ ASQ:SEs have been completed in CT using Sparkler.

Of the ASQ-3s, 61% on track in all categories; 23% at least one monitor; 16% with at least one refer.

Of the ASQ:SE-2s, 77% on schedule, 12% monitor, 11% refer.



Scaling Impact in CT



- Continue to grow impact through deeper partnership and collaboration.
- Build local connections and partnerships, e.g. Waterbury, Stamford.
- Building systems — linking healthcare, school readiness, districts, community — to work together on behalf of families.
- Direct-to-Family push with HMG as “safety net” to scale impact.

Funding Sources



- **Funded in CT by the Office of Early Childhood via:**
 - **Preschool Development Grant (PDG)**
 - **Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund**
- **Going forward, looking at expanding by tapping into other sources of funding and expanding in the context of HMG CT.**

Support for Providers

- Training and technical assistance
- Learning communities
- Office hours
- Continuing to build systems and build connections

5. Discussion

Discussion

Questions/thoughts about Sparkler's features/functions?

Questions about how Sparkler has been incorporated into the HMG work in Connecticut?

How can mobile, personal, and interactive technology support your work?

How could Sparkler support your work?



THANK YOU!

Thanks for working with us to help all CT children get off to a strong start!

Get more information at <https://playsparkler.org/connecticut> or cdi.211CT.org

Questions: email support@playsparkler.org