

Sparkler is a family engagement and support tool that the CT Office of Early Childhood offers to **all families** in the state with children prenatal to age 5 and to **all programs** across the state serving families with young children. Since OEC made Sparkler available statewide in 2021, Sparkler has become the **primary way** that 211 Child Development and **more than 850 individual schools, family resource centers, family child care programs, and community programs** across the State are offering the Ages & Stages Questionnaires (ASQ-3 and ASQ:SE) and follow-up support services to families in their care, as well as the primary way programs across the state are engaging with families and building knowledge of child development and parenting. Sparkler's dashboard is accessible via the web to authorized providers and its mobile app is available for iOS and Android in English, Spanish, Chinese, French, and Arabic. In the last year, **96.7% of new registrations for ASQs** across the state of Connecticut were using the Sparkler app and **86.6% of screenings completed** in the year and tracked centrally were completed using the Sparkler app as opposed to paper screenings or ASQ online.

In 2024, Sparkler recorded **298,367** actions in Connecticut as parents browsed the app. Actions are defined as completed play activities, engagement with classroom/child care teachers, home visitors, and other providers, and completed developmental screenings. In that same time period, Sparkler recorded **112,921** engagements by Connecticut-based providers using Sparkler's dashboard system. Currently, Sparkler's Connecticut-based team of family & community engagements specialists (which is funded as part of the Sparkler budget) has trained **2,260 Connecticut educators, healthcare providers, and community leaders** and given this group of early childhood workers access to Sparkler's web-based dashboard, which they are actively using to download data and reports, engage with families with Sparkler's two-way messaging system, suggest activities and tips to families to answer their questions about child development, and offer follow up after screening/referrals to specialized services.

By the end of 2024, **28,197 parents/caregivers** had created accounts in Sparkler, some with one child and some with multiple children. The total number of CT children served by the end of 2024 was **32,103**. More than **14,000 of those parent accounts actively used the app** to access screening, play activities, tips for adults, messaging, and connection with their programs/providers in the year. **18,472 screenings were completed** in the year. Some families choose to browse play activities and tips and some choose to complete the activities. Sparkler recorded **about 6,000 completed play activities in the year** and worked with OEC to build custom technology to send families suggested activities to support child development after scoring in "monitor" on the ASQ — this feature rolled out in October 2024.

**OEC has not budgeted Sparkler per child.** Rather, OEC pays Sparkler to provide the app to all families and the dashboard to all providers, as well as a team of family & community engagement specialists, custom technology development, and additional support. The budget covers the following activities:

1. **Activity 1:** Developmental Screening and ASQ Integration, which includes site fees for screening within all 45+ of OEC's funded home visiting agencies and within all of Connecticut's 169 towns, as well as per screening fees owed to the publisher of the ASQ, and maintenance of the screening technology and API.
2. **Activity 2:** Family and Community Engagement, which includes project management, engaging a team of four family & community engagement specialists to do program training and family education across the state (including 2 who are bilingual Spanish/English), printing materials for families and providers, supporting the United Way's 211 Child Development Care Coordination function, coordinating with other state agencies and entities (e.g., the State Department of Education and the CT State Library), and special campaigns, e.g., a special Help Me Grow outreach campaign to engage families through their pediatricians. In 2024, Sparkler's family & community engagement specialists hosted more than 150 in person and virtual trainings to engage, support, and train programs and families, and also attended/engaged at dozens of in-person local events and conferences.
3. **Activity 3:** Tech Integration and Customization, which includes maintaining the app, fixing bugs, and responding to the needs of Connecticut families and providers, as well as creating custom technology — developed collaboratively with OEC — that supports the needs of Connecticut families and programs. For example, in 2024, Sparkler developed and released in collaboration with OEC a prenatal version of the app building knowledge/connection for CT families expecting new babies.
4. **Activity 4:** Content Development, which covers Sparkler's messages (automatic and custom/individualized) that go to families using the app, as well as rolling out new/engaging families responsive to families' and program's needs and concerns related to child development. This includes Sparkler's summer learning program for CT families, which provides eight weeks of folktales from around the world in multiple languages, along with play-based learning activities aligned with these stories to build skills and knowledge all summer for our 0-5 year olds.
5. **Activity 5:** Support and project management, which includes CT-specific data analysis and provision of the Sparkler dashboard, app, and database across the state to all programs and families with young children.

If Sparkler were to charge us — as they do in some other states where they charge per child and per site fees in addition to flat fees for fixed costs — the total price would be higher than what OEC has currently negotiated.