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## **COMPREHENSIVE EYE EXAMS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT FOR CLASSROOM SUCCESS**

***Few parents realize that one in four children have undetected vision problems, American Optometric Association survey shows***

**ST. LOUIS, MO, Aug. 4, 2008-** The American Optometric Association (AOA) reminds parents that good vision is critical for many classroom tasks - from reading books or seeing a blackboard to viewing a computer screen. Without healthy vision, students can face unnecessary challenges not only in the classroom, but also to their mental, physical, social and emotional well being.

A comprehensive eye examination for students is one of the most important "to-dos" as children head back to school, and yet it is often overlooked. Without an eye exam, many children will suffer from undetected vision problems, and some may even be misdiagnosed as having a learning disorder.

The AOA's 2008 American Eye-Q® survey, which assesses public knowledge and understanding of a wide range of issues related to vision and eye health, showed that 87 percent of respondents were unaware that one in four children have a vision problem.

"Ten million school children in America have vision conditions that can negatively affect learning," said Dr. Leonard Press, optometrist and the AOA's Vision & Learning Specialist. "Many parents rely on vision screenings in school to check for eye problems, but that isn't enough. Comprehensive eye exams are necessary to detect problems that a simple screening can miss, such as eye coordination, moderate amounts of farsightedness and astigmatism."

According to the AOA, vision screenings are not diagnostic, and therefore, typically identify only a small portion of the vision problems in children. Below are essential elements an optometrist will check for during a comprehensive eye examination to help ensure learning is maximized through good vision.

- Visual acuity is measured at several distances so students can comfortably and efficiently read, work on the computer and see the chalkboard.
- Focusing or accommodation is an important skill that is tested. Eyes must be able to focus on a specific object, and to easily shift focus from one object to another. This allows the child to move visual attention from a book to the chalkboard and back.
- Visual alignment and ocular motility are evaluated. Ideally, the muscles that aim each eye converge so that both eyes are aimed at the same object, refining depth perception.

- Binocular fusion (eye teaming) skills are assessed. These skills are critical to coordinate and align the eyes precisely so the brain can fuse the pictures it receives from each eye into a single image.
- Eye tracking skills are tested to determine whether the child can track across a page accurately and efficiently while reading, and can copy material quickly and easily from the chalkboard or another piece of paper.
- Testing preschoolers' color vision is important because a large part of the early educational process involves the use of color identification.
- Eye-hand-body coordination, critical for handwriting, throwing a ball or playing an instrument, and visual perception, used to interpret and understand visual information like form, size, orientation, texture and color perception, are important visual functions that are reviewed.
- Overall eye or ocular health is determined by examining the structures of the eye.

If these vision skills are lacking or the eyes are not functioning properly, it can lead to headaches, fatigue and other eyestrain problems. Parents should be aware of symptoms that may indicate that a child has a vision or visual processing problem. Be sure to tell an optometrist if a child frequently:

- Loses his or her place while reading;
- Avoids close work;
- Holds reading material closer than normal;
- Tends to rub his or her eyes;
- Has headaches;
- Turns or tilts head to use one eye only;
- Makes frequent reversals when reading or writing;
- Uses finger to maintain place when reading;
- Omits or confuses small words when reading;
- Consistently performs below potential.

Studies indicate that 60 percent of children identified as "problem learners" actually suffer from undetected vision problems. According to the AOA's American Eye-Q® survey, only 39 percent of adults understand that behavioral problems can be an indication of vision problems.

Early detection and treatment provide the very best opportunity to treat and correct vision problems to help children see clearly. The AOA recommends that a child's first eye exam take place at six months of age. Unless problems are detected, the next exam should be at age three, and then every two years once a child begins school. Unfortunately, the Eye-Q® survey showed that 57 percent of children did not receive their first eye exam until age five or older.

"Good vision doesn't just happen," Dr. Press said. "A child's brain learns how to use eyes to see, just like it learns how to use legs to walk or a mouth to form words. The longer a vision problem goes undiagnosed and untreated, the more a child's brain has to overcompensate to live with the vision problem, instead of developing and learning normally."

For additional information regarding children's vision, please visit [www.aoa.org](http://www.aoa.org)

### About the survey:

*The third annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From May 17-19, 2008, using an online methodology, PSB interviewed 1,001 Americans 18 years and older who embodied a nationally representative sample of U.S. general population. (Margin of error at 95% confidence level.)*

## About the American Optometric Association (AOA):

*The American Optometric Association represents approximately 36,000 doctors of optometry, optometry students and paraoptometric assistants and technicians. Optometrists serve patients in nearly 6,500 communities across the country, and in 3,500 of those communities are the only eye doctors. Doctors of optometry provide two-thirds of all primary eye care in the United States.*

*American Optometric Association doctors of optometry are highly qualified, trained doctors on the frontline of eye and vision care who examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases and disorders of the eye. In addition to providing eye and vision care, optometrists play a major role in a patient's overall health and well-being by detecting systemic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension.*

*Prior to optometry school, optometrists typically complete four years of undergraduate study, culminating in a bachelor's degree. Required undergraduate coursework for pre-optometry students is extensive and covers a wide variety of advanced health, science and mathematics. Optometry school consists of four years of post-graduate, doctoral study concentrating on both the eye and systemic health. In addition to their formal training, doctors of optometry must undergo annual continuing education to stay current on the latest standards of care. For more information, visit [www.aoa.org](http://www.aoa.org).*

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