

**IMPORTANCE OF  
COMPREHENSIVE EYE AND VISION EXAMINATIONS**

**Resolved, That Illinois Association of School Boards, through its constituent organizations, urge local school districts to adopt a policy of required vision examinations, along with the health examinations, at kindergarten (or first grade), fifth, and ninth grades as recommended in Illinois Administrative Code, Subpart F, Section 665.610-665.640; and be it further**

**Resolved, That Illinois Association of School Boards, through its constituent organizations, support legislation to require a comprehensive eye and vision examination, by an optometrist or ophthalmologist, for all children entering kindergarten (or first grade) as an important component to school readiness.**

- It is estimated that one-in-four school-aged children has a vision problem and that undiagnosed and untreated vision impairments during the important formative years of a child's development can seriously interfere with learning and contributes to poor performance in school; and
- Vision screenings are mandated by the Illinois Department of Public Health for all children in any public, private, or parochial preschool, kindergarten, second grade, eighth grade, including transfer students, teacher referrals, and those receiving special education services, yet according to the 2004 Illinois Department of Public Health Vision Conservation Annual Report, only 28% of all parents, whose child failed a vision screening, completed the recommended referrals to an eye doctor; and
- Vision screenings are limited, do not provide a diagnosis nor prescribe treatment, and can only identify *possible* vision problems, thus leaving the children *not* identified at risk with undetected and untreated eye or vision problems; and
- The latest study by the National Institute of Health "Vision in Preschoolers Study" found that vision screenings missed more than 30 percent of vision problems diagnosed by eye examinations; and
- Eye and vision problems are best detected and treated early; including amblyopia, a loss of vision, which develops after constant suppression of vision of one eye and usually needs to be diagnosed by the age of 6 years in order to prevent the leading cause of monocular blindness in children and young adults; and
- Illinois law, Public Act 93-0504, confirms vision screening is *not a substitute* for a complete eye and vision evaluation by an eye doctor.

# REFERENCES

*for Proposed IASB Resolution*

## **Importance of Comprehensive Eye and Vision Examinations**

- 1.) Impaired vision in children can seriously impede learning and contributes to the development of emotional and behavioral problems. Nationally the percentage of eye defects among all school children is between 20-25%. It is doubtful if any other handicapping condition so drastically affects such a large segment of the school population. *Source: Illinois Department of Public Health, Vision Screening Manual; July 2001; Page 1.*
- 2.) A good education for your child means good schools, good teachers, and good vision. Your child's eyes are constantly in use in the classroom and at play. So when his or her vision is not functioning properly, learning and participation in recreational activities will suffer. The basic vision skills needed for school use are: Near vision; Distance vision; Binocular coordination; Eye movement skills; Focusing skills; Peripheral awareness; Eye/hand coordination. *Source: Eye Care Sourcebook, Second Edition; Health Reference Series; Edited by Amy L. Sutton; Peter E. Ruffner, Publisher; Copyright 2003 Omnigraphics, Inc.; Chapter 4, Section 4.4, Page 31; Reprinted with permission from the American Optometric Association.*
- 3.) Since vision problems can begin at an early age, it is very important that children receive proper eye care. Untreated problems can worsen and lead to permanent vision loss and delayed development. *Source: Children's Eye Health and Safety; American Academy of Ophthalmology; Medem Medical Library, 2003; Nancy W. Dickey, MD, Editor-in-Chief of Medem; www.aao.org.*
- 4.) Amblyopia can be defined for the purposes of this discussion as diminished visual acuity in one eye in the absence of organic eye disease. Central vision develops from birth to age 6 or 7; if vision has not developed by then, there is little or no chance that it will develop later. *Source: General Ophthalmology, Thirteenth Edition; a Lange medical book; by Daniel Vaughan, MD; Taylor Asbury, MD; Paul Riordan-Eva, FRCS, FCOphth; Published by Appleton & Lange; Norwalk, Conn.; Copyright 1992 by Appleton & Lange; Page 393.*
- 5.) Delayed diagnosis and treatment of vision problems, including amblyopia, can lead to vision loss, the need for more costly and prolonged treatment, and ultimately loss of productivity. As a result, high error and poor compliance rates inherent in vision screening programs contribute to the economic impact that vision disorders place on our society. *Source: "Insights on the Efficacy of Vision Examinations & Vision Screenings for Children First Entering School;" by Joel N. Zaba, MA, OD; Rochelle Mozlin, OD, MPH; William T. Reynolds, OD; Journal of Behavioral Optometry; Volume 14/2003/Number 5; Page 125.*
- 6.) Screening is NOT a diagnostic procedure and does NOT determine that correction of a possible defect or need for glasses is indicated. Diagnoses are made only by an eye doctor. *Source: Illinois Department of Public Health, Vision Screening Manual; July 2001; Page 3.*

- 7.) During a child's first 12 years, 80 percent of all learning comes through vision. And yet most children have not had a comprehensive eye exam prior to starting school. Many parents think the eye screening given at school is good enough to detect eye health problems. *Source: "Dear Journalist letter;" Back in School Campaign Insert; American Optometric Association; August 1, 2003.*
- 8.) "This came about as a result of a mother's concern over the failure of vision screening to detect her child's visual problems," Mr. Horstman (Executive Director of the Illinois Optometric Association) said. "She took it upon herself to go to her legislator and have the legislation drafted. We were certainly in total support of her, because we believe that a vision screening is no substitute for a complete eye exam." *Source: "Illinois law differentiates between full eye exams and screenings;" by Jennifer Byrne, Staff Writer; Primary Care Optometry News; Number 8, Volume 11; November 1, 2003; Page 4.*
- 9.) The interrelationship between vision problems and learning difficulties and the cost of undetected vision problems to society are of major concern. Vision problems may not be the direct cause of learning disorders, but they can interfere with a child's ability to perform to his potential. When a child fails to progress in school, the cost to society is enormous, especially in the way of special education services. *Source: "Pre-school screenings: Are they enough?" by Carl F. Gruning, OD, FCOVD, FAAP; Optometric Management; July 2001; Page 72.*
- 10.) Only 14 percent of American children get comprehensive eye examinations before age 6, Sullins (Chairman of Operation Bright Start) told the Review of Optometry, leaving them vulnerable to eye disease and learning problems when they begin school. *Source: "A Lens on Learning;" by Susan Black, American School Board Journal contributing editor; American School Board Journal; November 2002; Page 52.*
- 11.) The Vision Examination Bill, which was introduced by Rep. Terry Steczo in the beginning of the legislative session, has been officially signed into law by Governor James Thompson. The law, which is identical to school dental codes, recommends school districts adopt a policy requiring vision examinations for students entering first, fifth and ninth grades. "I think this law is extremely beneficial to the children of Illinois who may have been overlooked when it came to their eye care," said Dr. Martin Sikorski, President of the Illinois Optometric Association." *Source: "Governor Signs Vision examination Bill;" News of the Illinois Optometric Association; Volume 2, No. 4; September-October 1987; Page 1.*
- 12.) Early discovery and treatment can prevent or at least alleviate many of these problems. Children with impaired vision often are not aware of their handicap; therefore, they do not complain or seek help. If they have always seen in a blurred or distorted way, they accept the imperfect image without question. For this reason, it is up to the adults responsible for the child's health care and educational process to detect those children with vision problems. *Source: Illinois Department of Public Health, Vision Screening Manual; July 2001; Page 1.*