

Regular Eye and Vision Care Crucial to Classroom Success

With the end of summer upon us, it's already time to begin gearing up for another school year. Sometimes, while scrambling to purchase the latest and greatest school supplies and fashion accessories, and performing other tasks on the back-to-school checklist, scheduling a thorough eye exam for each child before they head to the classroom can get lost in the shuffle.

Healthy vision is an important part to the learning process and success in school. Reading, writing and computer work are among the visual skills that students are required to perform daily. Despite the strong correlation between vision and learning, many Americans underestimate the number of children affected by eye and vision problems. The fact is that one in four students has a visual impairment.

A child's vision may change frequently, yet most parents are not including eye exams as part of their child's back-to-school checklist. This is unfortunate because regular eye and vision care is crucial to a student's classroom success.

Since it is possible for children to have serious vision problems without being aware of them, the American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends screenings during regular pediatric appointments, and vision testing is recommended for all children around three years of age. After Age 3, children should have their eyes screened every one to two years. If there is a family history of vision problems or if your child appears to have strabismus (crossed eyes), amblyopia (lazy eye), or ptosis (drooping of the upper eyelid) you should speak with your eye care



professional about when and how often your child's eyes should be examined. In between visits to the eye doctor, parents, as well as teachers, should keep a watchful eye out for some of the more prevalent signs that a child's vision may be impaired.

It is recommended that parents contact their eye care professional if their child frequently:

1. Loses place while reading
2. Tends to rub eyes
3. Has headaches
4. Turns or tilts head
5. Uses finger to maintain place when reading
6. Consistently performs below potential
7. Struggles to complete homework
8. Squints while reading or watching television
9. Has behavioral problems
10. Holds reading material closer than normal

It is especially important to monitor the signs and symptoms of vision problems as a student progresses in school. If a child's vision is impaired, increasing visual demands such as smaller print in textbooks or additional homework can significantly alter a student's performance. And, new technology changes in the classroom, such as the use of interactive whiteboards, can also potentially exacerbate less obvious vision problems. Without healthy vision, students may suffer not only in the classroom, but also mentally, physically and emotionally.

The earlier a vision problem is detected and treated, the more likely treatment will be successful. Comprehensive eye exams play a critical role in this process. It is important to keep in mind, a school vision screening, while helpful, is not a substitute for a comprehensive eye examination. Screenings vary in scope and are not designed to detect many visual problems that can significantly impact tasks like reading where more than clarity of vision is needed. Comprehensive eye exams are essential for comfortable and healthy vision. ∞

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