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Back-to-School Checklist Should Include Trip to Eye Doctor *Teachers Recognize that Vision and Learning are Interdependent*

ST. LOUIS, Mo., July 28, 2010 – Parents and students throughout the country are crossing items off their back-to-school checklists, but most are missing an important task to ensure learning success – a visit to the eye doctor for a comprehensive eye exam. According to an American Optometric Association (AOA) survey of K-12 teachers, 81 percent believe vision and learning are interdependent.

“Healthy vision is critical to learning and excelling in school,” said Dr. Pamela Lowe, optometrist and the AOA’s vision & learning specialist. “Comprehensive eye exams should be performed to detect problems like astigmatism, eye coordination and moderate amounts of farsightedness, conditions that can prohibit optimal learning.”

Many experts believe that approximately 80 percent of learning comes through a child’s eyes. Reading, writing and computer work are just a few of the tasks students are expected to perform daily that require visual skills. As classrooms adopt more technologically advanced tools, such as interactive blackboard presentations, the dependence on adequate visual capabilities will increase.

Below are essential elements an optometrist will check during a comprehensive eye exam to make certain 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 blackboard.
- ✓ Focusing 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 blackboard 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 blackboard 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 health is determined by examining the structures of the eye.

Studies indicate that some children with undetected vision problems can be misdiagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHA). The AOA survey revealed that 64 percent of teachers witnessed a direct improvement in a child's academic performance and/or classroom behavior after an eye or vision problem was diagnosed and treated. If your child experiences any of the following, an optometrist should be consulted about a possible vision problem:

- ✓ Loses place while reading
- ✓ Avoids close work
- ✓ Tends to rub eyes
- ✓ Has headaches
- ✓ Turns or tilts head
- ✓ 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
- ✓ Struggles to complete homework
- ✓ Squints while reading or watching television
- ✓ Has behavioral problems
- ✓ Holds reading material closer than normal

Early detection and treatment are key in correcting vision problems and helping children see clearly. The AOA recommends that a child's first eye assessment take place at 6 months of age. Comprehensive eye exams should be conducted beginning at age 3, before a child enters school, and then every two years, unless otherwise advised by an optometrist. In between exams, parents and teachers should monitor children for the more prevalent signs that a student's vision may be impaired.

To find an optometrist in your area, or for additional information on children's vision or the importance of back-to-school eye exams, please visit www.aoa.org.

About the AOA teacher survey:

The survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with TNS. From May 13-17, 2010, using an online methodology, TNS interviewed 300 full- and part-time teachers for grades kindergarten through grade 8, and 100 full- and part-time teachers for grades 9-12. All respondents were 18 years and older and embodied a nationally representative sample of full- and part-time teachers. (Margin of error at 90 percent confidence level.) TNS is part of Kantar the world's largest research, insight and consultancy network. Please visit www.tns-us.com.com for more information.

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.

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