



NEW ILLINOIS STATE LAW REQUIRES COMPREHENSIVE EYE EXAMS FOR CHILDREN STARTING SCHOOL

Healthy Eyes Are the Key to Successful Learning for Children

Dear School Administrators,

Assuring a child's ability to see clearly in school is one of the most effective ways to maximize their learning potential. As you may be aware, a new state law requiring eye exams for all school-aged children took effect on January 1, 2008. Although parents have until October 15 to provide proof of an eye exam, the Illinois Parent-Teacher Association, the Illinois Federation of Teachers, the Illinois Optometric Association and the Vision First Foundation are working to raise awareness now about the new law.

Information About the New Law:

Thanks to the work and leadership of these organizations, Illinois now leads the nation with the most comprehensive eye health care requirements for children. The new law requires comprehensive eye exams for children entering kindergarten or enrolling for the first time in public, private, or parochial elementary schools in Illinois. Children will be required to have the eye exam performed only by qualified eye doctors—such as optometrists and ophthalmologists. The law states that *“an eye examination shall at a minimum include history, visual acuity, subjective refraction to best visual acuity near and far, internal and external examination, and a glaucoma evaluation, as well as any other tests or observations that in the professional judgment of the doctor are necessary.”* The law calls for the eye exam to take place within one year prior to kindergarteners starting school in the fall and for all students who are entering school for the first time in Illinois. Proof of the eye exam must be submitted by October 15 of each school year. Additionally, eye examinations at various grade levels may be required when deemed necessary by school authorities.

A Pledge to All Illinois Students:

A professional, comprehensive eye examination by an eye doctor is essential for the diagnosis and timely treatment of eye and vision problems. Comprehensive eye examinations are a cost-effective investment in our children. We want to ensure that all children in Illinois have access to quality, affordable eye health care. Approximately 70 percent of children are insured for comprehensive eye exams through private insurance, Medicaid, S-CHIP or other state or federal programs. Optometrists, ophthalmologists and local charitable organizations have provided ongoing assistance for families in need. Additionally, several benevolent (free of charge) programs designed for those children who do not qualify for medical assistance or do not have private insurance are available in many communities.

How Can You Help?

We need your support. Specifically, we need you to continue spreading the message about this new law and about the important role healthy vision plays in a child's education. We ask that you forward this information packet to your district's principals, teachers and school nurses. We have provided additional resources in this packet to assist you.



Enclosed you will find:

- A teachers guide to student vision in the classroom
- A copy of Illinois' Children's Eye Examination Law
- A copy of the Illinois Eye Examination Report Form

We realize that the official rules for this program are yet to be released by Public Health and that the form is also unofficial, however, in order to ensure that all children will have the opportunity to be examined by a doctor before school begins, we are asking that you act now.

As a school district administrator, you play a vital role in the quality of your students learning experience. By helping to spread the message regarding vision and eye health, you are ensuring that your students maximize their academic performance.

For more information on the new law or for additional resources or materials, please feel free to contact Mike Horstman our Executive Director at 1-800-933-7289 or at ioaed@ioaweb.org.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charlotte F. Nielsen, O.D." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Charlotte F. Nielsen, O.D.
President
Illinois Optometric Association