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Media Contact: Melissa Moore
melissa@map-communications.com

Make Eye Exams Part of the Back to School Routine

Majority of children start school without ever having an eye examination

Portland, OR, August 4, 2009 – Children across the country are gearing up for a new school year. Before heading back to the classroom, the Oregon Optometric Physician's Association (OOPA) recommends a visit to the eye doctor because healthy vision is a key to learning and succeeding in school. Reading, writing and computer work are among the visual skills that students are required to perform daily. However, studies show that 86 percent of children start school without ever having an eye examination.

Research indicates that approximately 80 percent of learning comes through a child's eyes. Despite the strong correlation between vision and learning, many Americans underestimate the number of children affected by eye and vision problems. According to the 2009 American Eye-Q® survey, which assesses public knowledge and understanding of a wide range of issues related to eye and visual health, 88 percent of respondents did not realize that one in four students have a visual impairment.

"Because a child's vision may change frequently, regular eye and vision care is crucial to a student's classroom success," said Dr. Kirsten Scott, optometric physician in Bend. "Unfortunately, most parents are not including eye exams as part of their child's back-to-school health check-up."

Studies indicate that 60 percent of children identified as "problem learners" actually suffer from undetected vision problems and in some cases have been inaccurately diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Parents, as well as teachers, should keep a look out for the following signs that a child's vision may be impaired:

- ✓ 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

Many parents are not as aware of the less obvious warning signs of eye and vision problems. The Eye-Q® survey found that only one-third of parents identified using a finger while reading (31 percent) or behavioral problems (35 percent) as potential signs of vision impairment.

"It is especially important to monitor the signs and symptoms of vision problems as a student progresses in school," said Dr. Scott. "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. In addition, 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 performed by optometrists play a critical role in this process. It is important to keep in mind that a school vision screening, while helpful, is not a substitute for a comprehensive eye examination.

Good eye sight and healthy vision also goes beyond the classroom. The OOPA also recommends that parents keep in mind these tips for recreational sports or after-school activities.

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.oregonoptometry.org.

About the survey:

The fourth annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned for the American Optometric Association in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From May 21 – 24, 2009, using an online methodology, PSB interviewed 1,000 Americans 18 years and older who embodied a nationally representative sample of U.S. general population. (Margin of error at 95 percent confidence level.)

About the Oregon Optometric Physicians Association

The Oregon Optometric Physicians Association is a statewide organization comprised of Doctors of Optometry, college of optometry faculty, optometric students and industry-related associates. It advocates advancing the quality, availability and accessibility of eye, vision and related health care. It also works to represent the profession of optometry, to enhance and promote the independent and ethical decision making of its members, and to assist optometric physicians in practicing the highest standards of patient care. Based in Milwaukie, Oregon, the OOPA has nearly 400 members. For more information, visit www.oregonoptometry.org.

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