

## Eye Exams Required For Students Referred to Special Education

**I**magine struggling to determine the numbers on a clock or to distinguish the letters on a sign. What if you had to squint to see the arrival of the school bus? Think about how discouraging it could be to get a headache from simply reading your favorite story, or doing your homework, or trying to see the chalkboard in the classroom.

For a child to be able to learn, he or she must be able to see. For students referred to special education programs, good vision is even more critical to improving their performance in school.

The good news is that as of July 1, 2004 all students referred to special education programs must receive a comprehensive eye exam from an eye doctor. The legislation was authored by Senator Randy Gardner (R - Bowling Green) as part of Amended Senate Bill 95. The legislation stipulated that cost would not be an issue for those students who need an eye exam.

A new website has been created - [www.ipeeyeexam.org](http://www.ipeeyeexam.org) with important information for the school, parent or doctor.

Parents are requested to schedule an appointment with an eye doctor within 90 days of being notified by school nurse of a student's need for an eye exam. (If a student had an eye exam during the previous nine months, there is no need to have another exam). The doctor can download the eye exam form directly from the website.

# Q & A

## **Why should a child referred to special education programs be required to have an eye exam?**

*How and what a child sees is very important. Being able to see means being able to learn. A complete eye exam can detect vision problems and if vision is an issue, the eye doctor can offer suggestions to improve a child's performance in school. An eye doctor can make the diagnosis and recommendations regarding the child's vision needs.*

## **Who pays for my child's exam?**

*Most children already have some form of insurance that covers eye exams. In cases where there is no coverage, call (800) 874-9111.*

## **Who performs the eye examination?**

*An eye doctor, either an ophthalmologist or an optometrist, will perform a complete eye exam. The doctor will check the child's general eye health, focusing capability, eye movement, ability to see clearly far and near, how both eyes move together, and determine if there is a need for correction to improve the child's vision.*

## **What happens if the eye exam is not done within the recommended time frame? Will the child still be able to go to school?**

*Yes, the child can still attend school. The goal is to help students be ready to learn. No student will be kept out of school because they have not had an eye exam, but it is certainly better for the child to have the exam as soon as possible in case there are any vision problems interfering with learning.*

## **What is the parent's responsibility?**

*When the child is referred to a special education program, the parent should schedule an appointment with an eye doctor of their choice. The appointment needs to be made within 90 days of the initial diagnosis. However, if the child had an eye exam during the previous nine months, the requirement is already met.*

## **What is the school's responsibility?**

*Each school has its own method for dealing with special education programs. Generally, the school nurse will inform the parent that the child needs*

*an eye exam. The school can then provide a list of eye doctors in the community or refer the parent to [www.iepeyexam.org](http://www.iepeyexam.org). The school will also collect the completed report from the doctor.*

## **Does a child need an eye exam if the school nurse already performed a vision screening?**

*Screenings can pick up some vision problems, but only an eye doctor can evaluate a child's overall eye health and vision. During an eye exam, the doctor looks inside the child's eyes to see how well the eyes are being used. The doctor can detect specific problems that may hinder a child's ability to perform visual tasks and can make recommendations for treatment options to correct those problems.*

## **Will the doctor give the school the results of the eye exam?**

*After the exam the doctor will complete a standardized form and return it to the school.*