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

Doctor of Optometry in Waukegan, Illinois encourages parents to take children early for eye exams: Waiting could mean harm to children's' eyes and longer wait times

WAUKEGAN, Illinois – February 12, 2008– A new state law requiring eye exams for children enrolling for the first time in Illinois schools went into effect on January 1. Although parents have until October 15 to provide proof of an eye exam, doctors of optometry are asking parents to make appointments now for their children to avoid long wait times and to reduce the instances of eye and vision problems going undiagnosed and untreated in children.

According to the Illinois Optometric Association, the new state law requires comprehensive eye exams for children entering kindergarten or enrolling for the first time in public, private, or parochial elementary schools in Illinois. Since comprehensive eye exams are the best way to diagnose eye and vision problems in children early, before they interfere with a child's ability to learn, doctors of optometry agree that the new law is a crucial step in ensuring that Illinois students perform to the best of their ability in the classroom. Optometrists encourage parents to arrange for a comprehensive eye exam now, so that they beat the traditional summer rush and ensure that their child meets the necessary requirements in time for the beginning of the next school year.

"Since 80% of what children learn comes from their vision, it is critical that their vision skills and eye health be assessed early", says Dr. Steve Wexler, Waukegan optometrist and member of the American Optometric Association and Illinois Optometric Association. "With better vision comes better academic performance, higher self esteem and positive behavioral changes. Our Illinois school children deserve the best in education, and we will be positioned to help them learn better through vision that is more efficient. This new law is a good thing." Illinois teachers were strong advocates for the law, recognizing the important role eye exams by qualified eye doctors plays in a child's academic success.

Only licensed optometrists or ophthalmologists are qualified to conduct the exams under the new law. Proof of the required eye examination must be submitted by Oct. 15 of each school year. Additional vision examinations at various grade levels may be required when deemed necessary by school authorities.

"Thanks to this new law, Illinois now leads the nation with the best eye health care requirements for children," says Dr. Wexler. "With nearly 25 percent of school-age children suffering from vision problems, this law is necessary to help detect problems and treat and prevent diseases that can cause vision loss."

Illinois joins Kentucky and Missouri as the third state in the nation requiring eye exams for children entering public schools. Since the Kentucky law requiring eye exams was enacted eight years ago, 13 percent of Kentucky children have been identified as needing corrective lenses, 3.4 percent diagnosed with amblyopia ("lazy eye"), and 2.3 percent diagnosed with strabismus.

Ten million children suffer from vision disorders, according to the National Parent Teacher Association. Nationally, about 86 percent of children entering first grade do not receive an eye exam.

Comprehensive eye exams for children entering school are critical for the early intervention needed to treat diseases and disorders such as amblyopia, strabismus, retinoblastoma and other serious and potentially blinding problems that can lead to poor school performance and could ultimately affect quality of life.

To schedule an eye examination for your child or for more information, contact the office of Dr. Steve Wexler inside the Waukegan Wal-Mart Vision Center at 847-473-2568 or visit www.drstevewexler.com.