

# Ensure Your Child's Chances for Success: Schedule a Comprehensive Vision Exam



By Carole L. Hong, OD, FCOVD

Robin Benoit was frustrated and having a hard time finding answers to why her child was struggling with reading and learning. According to Jillian's fourth grade teacher, despite being very bright, Jillian was falling behind academically. She had poor handwriting, left many of her class assignments unfinished, skipped words when she read out loud, would daydream during silent reading, and was consistently going to the restroom during math.

Jillian was treated for a condition called amblyopia (also known as lazy eye), but she still struggled in school. Her mom continued to search on the Internet for information on reading and learning and when she thought she had found the answer to her daughter's problems, she found her pediatrician and ophthalmologist were not supportive. But Mrs. Benoit continued to follow her instincts, which led her to optometric vision therapy and a developmental optometrist who was able to help Jillian.

The results from optometric vision therapy changed Jillian's life, making it possible for her to learn and do many things she'd never done before. When they learned how widespread these types of vision problems are, Jillian and her mother decided to share their story by writing a book to help other parents ensure their child's chances for success, *Jillian's Story: How Vision Therapy Changed My Daughter's Life*.

In April 2011, Mrs. Benoit spoke at a School Readiness Summit that was held in Washington, D.C. in response to President Obama's call to ensure that no child is left behind in the classroom due to an undetected or untreated eye or vision disorder. The summit's interdisciplinary workgroup—comprising nearly 50 leaders in their respective fields—documented and recognized the

established link between healthy vision and classroom learning.

Among the national organizations that have already signed the School Readiness Summit joint principles statement are organizations such as the American Federation of Teachers, American Public Health Association, Council for Exceptional Children, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, National Association of School-Based Health Clinics, National Association of School Nurses, and the National Head Start Association.

The American Federation of Teachers recently acknowledged the vital role that vision plays in our children's education, stating the following:

“Even the most gifted students will struggle academically if they have trouble seeing the blackboard or focusing on a book. A tremendous amount of learning happens visually, so proper vision care is crucial to helping students reach their full potential.”

Research continues to show that vision disorders interfere with academic performance. Over 60% of children who have difficulty learning have undiagnosed vision problems at the root of their difficulties, yet many parents and educators assume that these children can see fine because they have passed vision screenings.

## **Will a School or Pediatrician Vision Screening Substitute for Comprehensive Vision Examination with a Doctor?**

No. The purpose of these vision screenings is to detect obvious vision problems and determine if there is an immediate need for a comprehensive vision examination. All children should have regular comprehensive vision exams. An estimated 10% of children have significant

need for eyeglasses, while approximately 15-20% suffers from poor vision skills. Efficient vision requires a number of critical visual skills, such as eye teaming, clear and sustained near vision, tracking, focusing, and accurate eye-hand coordination.

## **So What Can Parents Do to Improve Their Child's Chances for Success in School?**

First, recognize the shortcomings of vision screenings and make sure a comprehensive eye exam is on the top of the school readiness checklist every year. Sending your child to school with adequate vision skills can help them avoid difficulties with learning, attention, and unnecessary frustrations.

Second, be on the look out for any of the five most common signs that a vision problem may be interfering with your child's ability to read and learn, as any one of these symptoms is a sign of a possible vision problem.

1. Skips lines, rereads lines
2. Poor reading comprehension
3. Takes much longer doing homework than it should take
4. Reverses letters like “b” into “d” when reading
5. Has a short attention span with reading and schoolwork

For more information or to find a more in-depth symptoms checklist, visit [www.FamilyVisionCare.org](http://www.FamilyVisionCare.org).

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