

BEST PRACTICES FOR ADDRESSING VISION PROBLEMS IN SCHOOL

Screening and treating for vision problems is a great way to promote health in schools. Students who can see clearly are better able to build their reading skills and focus in the classroom. Common vision problems include vision problem myopia (near-sightedness), hyperopia (far-sightedness), and amblyopia (lazy-eye). Amblyopia is a high-risk vision problem that can be treated if found early, usually before age 7. Catching vision problems early is imperative!

STEPS FOR ADDRESSING VISION:

1. **Vision screening** allows us to check for students who *might* have vision problems using an electronic vision screener or Snellen eye chart. Vision screening can be done by a doctor, but can be done by any trained individual. It is important for schools to help make sure student who fail the screening get an eye exam.
2. An **eye exam** is done by an eye doctor and is necessary to confirm vision problems.
3. **Follow-up care** for vision occurs after the eye exam (i.e. glasses or treatment) and can prevent vision problems from getting worse. This is key!
4. **Help students follow good vision routines** if they need to (i.e. adjusting seating or wearing glasses)

VISION SCREENING

Who should be screened?

Healthy and Ready to Learn, NYC Community Schools, and other schools that have their own partner organizations screen students in all grades.

The NYCDOHMH is mandated to conduct screenings when students are in pre-K, kindergarten, and first grades. The school is responsible to screen all new entrants and students in third and Fifth grades.

How are vision screenings done in schools?

In New York City, the Office of School Health has a vision program which helps screen elementary school students across the city for vision problems. Some schools may run their own school-wide screening with vendors approved by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYCDOHMH).

How can we make sure we screen as many students as possible?

No matter how your school conducts vision screenings, these best practices encourage parent engagement and school administration support to help ensure all eligible students are screened, and if necessary, treated.

- **Send notices to parents** once vision screening dates have been scheduled. Encourage parents to make sure their child attends school while screenings are occurring. Stress the importance of vision screenings and the positive impact it can have for students in the classroom. Post the date on your school's website and on bulletin boards in the school.
- **Provide families with a point-person** in the school who can help answer any questions about vision screenings and passive consent. Parent coordinators, community school directors, and school nurses can help direct parent concerns or questions about vision screenings.
- **Set-up a designated screening area** in the school. Depending on who is running the screenings and the instruments they use, it may be necessary to have rooms with adjustable lighting. If you are screening a lot of students at once, it is best to run screenings in a setting with limited distractions.
- **Communicate with teachers** about vision screening schedules. It is helpful when teachers know when screenings are occurring so they can lesson plan around that block of time. They can also communicate the importance of vision screenings during Parent Engagement Tuesday calls or during school drop-off and pick-up.
- **Become familiar with the paperwork and data collected during screenings.** Having a sense of what happens during and after a vision screening may help you guide parents who have questions or report information to the Departments of Health and Mental Hygiene and Education. Students who do not pass a screening and require a complete vision exam will be sent an E12S form. Students are considered high-risk if a screening shows they may have amblyopia or another issue.

EYE EXAMS AND FOLLOW-UP

Eye exams after vision screenings are an important and critical step, especially if the screening indicated a child may have a vision problem. Engaging with families and connecting them to community resources for further care can help accelerate a child's formal diagnosis and access to the correct treatment.

- **Send results packet to families** immediately following the screening. All students screened should receive a letter to send home indicating their results (pass or did not pass). You should also include a fact sheet about why vision is important in the classroom and a list of eye doctors in the community for all students (see the Vision Fact Sheet on www.hrl.nyc). Any student who did not pass the screening must receive an E12S, a form required by the city. This form must be returned to the Office of School Health Vision Program after a student has visited an eye doctor. *Note: If eye doctors come on-site for follow-up eye exams and glasses distributions, parents **must** fill out proper consent.*
- **Call families of students that require follow-up** to ensure they received the packet and understand the results. Encourage them to visit a local eye doctor or sign a consent form for their child to be seen in school. Discuss how treating vision problems will help their child in the classroom using strength-based approaches like positive framing.
- **Form relationships with resources in the community** that can help families who many need to visit the eye doctor. Some companies may have coupons for glasses and lenses that can help families afford glasses.
- **Check-in with parents** if you notice a child having problems in the classroom because of vision or if they have not yet seen an eye doctor. Offering support and positive reinforcement may help them take action.

HELP STUDENTS BUILD GOOD VISION ROUTINES

It is great when students get glasses to correct their vision problems. But, it is important that they wear their glasses as prescribed! Students may need to be reminded to wear them in class or they may also need to be seated in a specific part of the classroom to optimize learning. There are ways you can help support a child's vision in the classroom.

- **Let parents know how their child is doing.** If a student has seen an eye doctor, call parents to thank them and let them know how the child is now doing in class. If you notice improvements, be sure to mention them on the phone! Create a plan with parents to make sure their child brings his/her glasses every day and is taking care of them.
- **Keep a list** of students who need to wear glasses in the classroom to help you monitor during the school day. Try and remind students to put on their glasses when needed (i.e. before reading time, when doing work on the blackboard).
- **Refer families to community partners and resources** that can help provide annual exams and repair glasses in case they break!