

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT NEBRASKA'S NEW LAW REQUIRING VISION EVALUATIONS FOR CHILDREN ENTERING SCHOOL



What is a "School Vision Evaluation"?

In 2005, the Nebraska Legislature passed a bill, LB114, to require written evidence of a vision evaluation for children entering a beginning grade (kindergarten) or transferring into any grade from out of state. The law takes effect starting with the 2006-2007 school year.



Is this the same as the school screenings that are currently being done within the school districts?

No, there are significant differences between a school screening and a professional vision examination. While screenings are very useful to detect some signs of a vision problem, typical screenings are not designed to identify many vision disorders that could impact the child's ability to learn. Screenings that involve just reading a standard eye chart detect only 5% of vision problems in children. Screenings may lead a parent to a false sense of security when it comes to the visual health of their child. An eyecare professional will be able to use instrumentation and training to detect any type of irregularity or possible disease of the eye, as well as abnormalities in development of the visual system.



What is the time frame for meeting this requirement?

The statute states "...within six months of entrance of a child into the beginner grade...". This would also apply to an out-of-state student's transfer to a Nebraska classroom.



What does a "vision evaluation" consist of?

The minimum testing to be done in order to comply with the law is as follows: testing for amblyopia (lazy eye), strabismus (misalignment of the eyes) and internal and external eye health, with testing sufficient to determine visual acuity. There are other tests that are commonly recommended and performed by many eyecare professionals, but the law sets out a minimum standard requirement. Parents should note that the minimum standard does not require that eyes be checked for refractive error, which is needed in order to determine prescriptions for eyeglasses or contact lenses. In addition to a refraction, other optional tests may evaluate depth perception, peripheral (side) vision, color vision, and eye movement.



Who is allowed by law to perform the required school vision evaluation?

The statute requires the evaluation to be completed by an optometrist, a physician, a physician's assistant, or an advanced practice registered nurse.



What is the cost and who is responsible for paying for this?

The cost will vary depending on whom the parent chooses to perform the evaluation. The expense for the exam is to be borne by parent or guardian of the child. Families are encouraged to check with their insurance companies to see what might be covered under their policies.



What if a parent cannot afford to pay for this service?

There are several options for lower income parents to receive coverage, including the Nebraska Medicaid Kids Connection program. Also, there are several civic and charitable organizations with programs directed towards situations such as these and many communities may have other options available from local organizations and local optometrists. The Nebraska Foundation for Children's Vision has a listing of resources on their website www.NEchildrensvision.org for anyone interested.



What paperwork is required to show proof of receiving the vision evaluation?

All Nebraska school districts were sent earlier this year a sample School Vision Evaluation form that was created by the Nebraska Foundation for Children's Vision and Nebraska School Board Association and reviewed by the Nebraska State Department of Education. Many of these forms are being distributed to parents in Kindergarten Roundup packets. However, school districts can choose to use or design their own form. It is up to each school district to determine what paperwork is required to verify completion of the vision evaluation.



Why has Nebraska required this vision exam now?

More and more research has shown that children with undetected vision problems will face challenges with learning, self-esteem and social issues. More than 80% of what children learn in school relies on vision, yet statistics show that 1 in 5 children entering kindergarten now have an undetected vision problem. Since learning is so dependent on vision, the Legislature felt it was appropriate to begin insuring that every child in Nebraska is visually prepared to succeed in school.