

## EYE-Q

by R. Thomas Barowsky, MD

### Blurry Vision and School Daze

Prevent Blindness America (PBA) has designated August as National Children's Eye Health Month. This makes a lot of sense to me since in a few weeks the little tykes will be heading off to school; some for the first time. As these youngsters prepare for their first encounter with our public and private school system they will have many unanswered questions like: "Is it really necessary to study Quantum Mechanics before I can count to one hundred?" or "How will I know my first novel will be a Pulitzer Prize winner if I can't even spell Pulitzer?" and "Who the heck is Pulitzer anyway?" While they worry about these important decisions in their life's future, eye care providers have been busy working to ensure they have access to the help they need to perform well by seeing well.

I will remind you once again of the "Vision Care for Kids Act" developed as separate bills by the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives. The important thing about these bills is that they are both fiscally responsible and are effective in providing critical vision care funding where it is needed most. Children who are identified with a vision threatening condition or other eye problem that is diagnosed during a vision screening or complete eye examination, will now be able to get the necessary follow up care through funding by this act.

The American Academy of Ophthalmology, American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus and other eye care organizations helped create and strongly support this act. The Vision Care for Kids Act complements individual state programs that identify vision problems in preschoolers and will help to close the gap for kids who fail a vision screening and who are not getting the follow up diagnosis and treatment they need. State grants are funded by the federal government for eye exams and additional treatment for uninsured children and for those whose health plans do not cover vision service.

For most children a vision-screening exam is all that is necessary to prepare them for school. In the small percentage of children who fail a screening exam a more complete eye exam is indicated and would be covered by this act for those who qualify. In this way there will also be significant cost savings to families without risking their child's vision or eye health.

Two to 5% of children who fail a vision-screening exam have significant eye problems beyond what can be fixed immediately with glasses. Many of these eye problems, if not treated early in life, can lead to permanent and irreversible vision loss. Unfortunately, 25% of parents whose children failed a vision-screening exam did not schedule a follow-up comprehensive vision exam for their children because of a lack of financial resources.

In addition to providing better access for all children to necessary eye care, this legislation complements the Children's Healthy Vision Campaign, which promotes routine vision screenings by pediatricians, family medicine providers and professionally trained screeners to identify children who need more comprehensive eye exams.

It is in the best interest of all of our children and for their future to have early and regular eye exams through vision screenings and basic eye exams. More extensive vision and eye health exams for those children at risk will help to guarantee a brighter future for those at risk as well.

Your cards, letters, emails and phone calls to your elected representatives made all of this possible. Professional eye care providers, the kids affected by this legislation and their parents all thank you.

*If you have questions about your eye health e-mail Dr. Barowsky at [doctom@tdkj.com](mailto:doctom@tdkj.com) and we'll try to answer your questions here at Eye-Q.*