

MINUTES OF THE HOUSE K-12 EDUCATION COMMITTEE.

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Ralph Tanner at 12:00 p.m. on March 22, 2001 in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

All members were present except:

Committee staff present: Ben Barrett, Legislative Research  
Avis Swartzman, Revisor of Statutes  
Ann Deitcher, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee: Mark DeSetti, Kansas National Education Assoc.  
Gary L. Robbins, Kansas Optometric Association

**SB 220 - At-risk pupil weighting and mastery of basic reading skills.**

Ben Barrett spoke to the Committee in explanation of **SB 220**. He said the bill had a fiscal note of \$4 million.

Asked if the entire funding fees for **SB 220** were in the Governor's presentation of his bill as well as in his State of the State address, Dale Dennis said yes, all the Governor did was channel where it could be spent. When asked how this bill would fit in relationship to **HB 2546**, Mr. Dennis said that it would just add an extra \$4 million channeled for K-3 until they reached the third grade reading standard.

Mark Desetti testified in favor of **SB 220**. (Attachment 1).

Gary Robbins spoke to the Committee regarding stronger language in the law that would encourage parents to get eye examinations for their children. He passed around copies of a questionnaire, a "vision report card". (Attachment 2).

Written testimony was passed out in regard to a report on vision screenings in USD 286 for students recommended for summer school programs. (Attachment 3).

The hearing on **SB 220** was closed.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:45 p.m. The next meeting is on the call of the Chair.

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KANSAS NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION / 715 SW 10TH AVENUE / TOPEKA, KANSAS 66612-1686

Mark Desetti Testimony  
House Education Committee  
March 19, 2001

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am Mark Desetti and I represent Kansas NEA. I appreciate this opportunity to speak in favor of SB 220 today.

All of us agree that mastery of reading skills is essential to success in school and in life. It has been said that up until third grade, we learn to read; after third grade we read to learn. For those students who have not mastered reading skills by the end of third grade, there are almost certain to be academic problems in the later grades. We know that the second-grade diagnostic test is a good indicator of whether or not a student is progressing in a manner that will allow that student to attain mastery by grade three. A student who does not do well on the second-grade diagnostic test ought to be considered an "at-risk" student.

Senate Bill 220 is an excellent approach to providing resources to schools working to bring all children up to grade level in reading. In directing a portion of the at-risk funding to mastery of third-grade reading skills, the legislature does not prescribe how to get the job done, but provides the wherewithal to do it. Senate Bill 220 trusts the local school board and the professionals in the district to develop and implement a program to assist children not meeting standards. This approach puts funding into programs that school districts have already been utilizing and allows other districts to explore additional alternatives to meeting the diverse needs of students.

This bill recognizes that to succeed will take some learners more time-on-task than others. It sets aside funds to assist districts in this endeavor. We think that this will greatly assist school districts in achieving a universal goal—all students mastering reading skills by the end of third grade.

Kansas NEA applauds this bill and hopes that the committee will take this approach. Thank you for listening to our concerns.

House Education Committee

Date: 3/22/01

Attachment # 1

# See To Learn®

## VISION REPORT CARD

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_

The following behaviors have been observed in your child, which could indicate a vision or other health problem that may affect your child's academic performance.

- Loses place frequently when reading
- Short attention span or daydreaming
- Re-reads or skips lines unknowingly when reading
- Uses finger as a guide when reading
- Avoids close work
- Complains of frequent headaches
- A drop in scholastic or sports performance
- Covers one eye
- Tilts the head (when reading)
- Squints one or both eyes
- Places head close to book or desk when reading or writing
- Has difficulty remembering, identifying and reproducing basic geometric forms
- Poor eye-hand coordination skills

It may be appropriate to seek a comprehensive vision examination from an optometrist or ophthalmologist for your child to rule out any vision problems. Please provide this information to your eye care professional.

School Official \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

House Education Committee

Date: 3/22/01

Attachment # 2

**REPORT ON VISION SCREENINGS  
IN USD 286 FOR STUDENTS RECOMMENDED  
FOR SUMMER SCHOOL PROGRAMS**

Prepared by  
Karen S. Aldridge, O.D., M.S.  
Gary L. Beaver, O.D.  
William F. Hefner, O.D., M.Ed.

November 27, 2000

House Education Committee

Date: 5/22/01

Attachment # 3-1

Chautauqua County Community

## Unified School District No. 286

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October 17, 2000

To Whom It May Concern:

On April 26, 2000, I had an opportunity to listen to a report at the Council of Superintendents from the Kansas Optometric Association about their vision therapy and reading research for the Kansas Legislature. I was intrigued by their numbers that 10-20% of our students might have an undetected vision problem. We have a high-risk student population in Chautauqua County Community USD 286. Over the summer, I was pleased to learn that additional research was funded by the Kansas Legislature.

In an effort to get involved, I volunteered our third grade students for the vision therapy and research study. I went one step further and asked the Kansas Optometric Association to recruit a team of volunteer optometrists to screen our students in grades 1-8 who were recommended for summer school. The question had occurred to me as to how many of our students who were recommended for summer school were being recommended because of vision problems. My concern became whether or not our summer school resources could have been better invested addressing underlying undetected vision problems.

The results surprised everyone involved and raised a few eyebrows. These are comprehensive screening results conducted and supervised by optometrists with school nurses and other staff members from surrounding school districts. I want to thank optometrists Dr. Gary Beaver, Independence, Dr Don Railsback, Neodesha and Dr. Warren Thomas, Coffeyville for participating and bringing some of their staff to assist in this research. In addition, I want to especially thank Gary Robbins, Executive Director of the Kansas Optometric Association and his staff, for the many hours of research, motivation, and deep concern for the children of Kansas. Finally, I appreciated Research Project Director Dr. William Hefner taking the time to travel to southeast Kansas to review the research protocol and methodology with the doctors along with reviewing and evaluating the findings.

Sincerely,



George Blevins

## OVERVIEW

The primary purpose of the screenings in Unified School District 286 at Sedan was to identify third-grade students who might qualify for inclusion in the Vision Therapy and Reading Performance Research Project conducted by the Kansas Optometric Association. Specifically, this research project focused on identifying and treating third-grade children with undetected vision problems involving focusing, tracking and teaming of the eyes. All 35 third-grade students in USD 286 were screened. National research shows that at least 20% of children may have a learning-related vision problem.

Second, USD 286 Superintendent George Blevins requested that all children in grades 1-8 who were recommended for summer school in 2000 also be screened. We didn't find a significant difference in the screening results between students who attended summer school and those who were recommended for summer school but elected not to attend, so the findings are included together. Superintendent Blevins wanted to know the prevalence of vision problems among students requiring additional services like summer school. Sixty-seven students recommended for summer school were screened in this research.

Third, Superintendent Blevins had one student from each grade between ninth and twelfth who had received additional services and support for reading throughout his/her schooling. All four failed the vision screening, but the small sample and lack of a specific criterion for inclusion prevent any meaningful conclusions.

Fourth, the socioeconomic factors and high-risk nature of the student population at this site are not necessarily representative of other student populations. This district has a high number of students on free or reduced lunches which places these students in the at-risk category. Preliminary findings from other test sites, however, are also returning higher than expected screening failure rates. In El Dorado, for example, 158 third graders were screened with more than 70% failing at least one section of the New York State Optometric Association Vision Screening Battery.

To confirm the USD 286 results in Sedan, we offered to conduct comprehensive vision examinations on the third-grade students who failed the initial screening. We received parental permission for comprehensive vision exams by optometrists for 26 of the 30 students who failed the initial screening. The comprehensive exams confirmed the screening results and led to the diagnosis of a vision problem in 25 of the 26 children tested. At least 23 children qualified for the current research study undertaken by the Kansas Legislature. The remaining children had a vision problem that could either be corrected with eyewear or had a significant condition that fell outside of the parameters of the study.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The primary screening tool was the nationally recognized New York State Optometric Association Vision Screening Battery. This has been the screening tool for both phases of the Vision Therapy and Reading Performance Research Project. School nurses from surrounding districts, public health nurses and reading teachers conducted the screenings in cooperation with three optometrists and their assistants. The research study is working to identify students with vision-related learning conditions, including accommodative dysfunction, convergence excess, convergence insufficiency, and ocular motor dysfunction. These conditions may affect reading because they represent potential focusing, teaming and tracking problems.

There are three key test results that may indicate a problem in these areas. First, accommodative amplitude helps identify potential focusing problems. Second, the King-Devick test is used to identify potential tracking problems. Third, near point of convergence is used for eye teaming problems. Failing the visual acuity test may indicate the need for corrective lenses but doesn't meet the parameters of this study.

## **THIRD-GRADE RESULTS**

Thirty-five third-grade students were screened for potential inclusion in the vision therapy and reading performance research. Among all the third-grade students from USD 286 who were screened, the failure rate was 80%. Four special education students in this sample failed the screening. The failure rate for third-grade students was 77.4% when special education students were excluded.

When screening results were looked at based on the three tests outlined (accommodative amplitude, King-Devick, and near point of convergence), the failure rate for third-grade students, excluding special education students (4) as well as students with visual acuity problems (2), becomes 75.9%. This means they failed either the focusing, tracking, or teaming tests or a combination of the three. Fifty percent of the four special education students failed all 3 areas being evaluated.

Failing a screening is not a definite indicator that a child has any of the conditions referenced in this study, because there may be children who fail a screening, but no problem is detected during a comprehensive eye exam.

## POTENTIAL SUMMER SCHOOL STUDENTS

There were 67 USD 286 students recommended for summer school in grades 1-8. The screening failure rate was 88.1%. The table below shows the breakdown by grade level and includes all students.

### USD 286 SCREENING RESULTS *Students Recommended for Summer School*

<i>Number of Students</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Pass Total</i>	<i>Total Subjects</i>	<i>Pass %</i>	<i>Fail Total</i>	<i>Total Subjects</i>	<i>Fail %</i>
13	First	1	13	7.7%	12	13	92.3%
7	Second	0	7	0.0%	7	7	100.0%
6	Third	1	6	16.7%	5	6	83.3%
6	Fourth	2	6	33.3%	4	6	66.7%
11	Fifth	2	11	18.2%	9	11	81.8%
10	Sixth	1	10	10.0%	9	10	90.0%
11	Seventh	1	11	9.1%	10	11	90.9%
3	Eighth	0	3	0.0%	3	3	100.0%
67		8	67	11.9%	59	67	88.1%

The screenings confirm that a significant number of students recommended for summer school in USD 286 had undetected vision problems. In addition, there were 22 special education students included in the table above.

After reviewing the failures on the accommodative amplitude, King-Devick and/or near point of convergence, 91% (20 of 22) of the special education students failed at least one of these areas. Six students failed all three screening tests for conditions involved in the study (27%). Special education students with other non vision-related conditions were not included in the vision therapy research.

Due to time and resource constraints, comprehensive vision exams were not performed on all summer school students who failed the screening. Of the potential and actual summer school students, only the third graders were examined. Five of the third-grade students in summer school or recommended for summer school who received vision examinations were found to have multiple vision problems covered within the parameters of the study for the Kansas Legislature.



## CONCLUSION

School vision screenings are extremely beneficial but they are not a substitute for a complete eye exam. Many of the students screened had never received an eye exam from an optometrist or ophthalmologist. In addition, most of the students screened had 20/20 visual acuity. This illustrates why more states are studying the value of requiring an eye exam before children start kindergarten. This research indicates the need to develop a protocol for identifying students who should receive additional screening tests by school nurses and potential referral for a complete eye exam. Superintendent Blevins pointed out the value of encouraging or requiring an eye exam for potential summer school students and students identified for reading or other remedial services. The issue of investing in vision care and treatment, if needed, for potential summer school students is worth further consideration and study.

Recently, the National Eye Institute authorized a national research study on the value of vision therapy treatment for children with convergence insufficiency. This means that the Kansas research on convergence insufficiency is already ahead of national efforts in this area.

It is critical to recognize that vision therapy treatment can be extremely beneficial in resolving vision problems, but it should not be viewed as a panacea or quick fix. Please remember that not all cases of convergence insufficiency require vision therapy treatment, but the more severe cases impacting school performance should be identified early and treated. Corrective eyewear may also be a treatment option for these children, especially those with convergence excess. Based on the limited availability of VT services and other available resources, it would be advisable to concentrate on identifying and treating undetected vision problems among either second or third graders as a starting point. Serious consideration should also be given to additional vision screenings by schools and requiring eye exams by optometrists or ophthalmologists, if needed, for students before entering any special service such as summer school, remedial reading or tutoring programs.