



February 4, 2021

TO: Senate Education Committee

FROM: Todd Fleischer, CAE
Executive Director, Kansas Optometric Association

RE: Senate Bill 62, Relating to Standards for School-Administered Vision Screenings

My name is Todd Fleischer. I am the Executive Director of the Kansas Optometric Association, which represents optometrists across Kansas. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the Kansas Vision Coalition Task Force (KVC) in support of SB 62, which deals with School-Administered Vision Screenings.

Vision plays an important role in children's learning. It is estimated that more than 40 percent of the brain is devoted to visual function and 80 percent of learning is a result of visual processing. Research shows that vision problems affect 10 percent of all preschool-aged children, with this number increasing to 20 percent by kindergarten. Despite this, only about 50 percent of children ages 3-5 receive a vision screening and only about 30 percent of children receive comprehensive vision care services before age six.

In 2017, Envision, Inc. spearheaded the organization of a Vision Summit to bring together a group of interested organizations to discuss current screening practices, sharing best practices, challenges and shortcomings of these screenings across Kansas. This group, from various disciplines and areas of the state, identified gaps in care that needed to be addressed as well as duplicate initiatives. The Kansas Vision Coalition Task Force (KVC) (a non-partisan, multidisciplinary team) was formed to provide direction and advocacy for issues related to vision screening and visual impairment, with the goal of early detection and treatment of vision problems. The Vision Summit meeting participants overwhelmingly identified improving the consistency and validity of vision screening as a priority area for infants/toddlers and school-aged children.

An Ad Hoc committee was formed, and an outline of the committee's work to improve vision health and to provide access services to children in Kansas is stated below.

1. Kansas Vision Screening Guidelines in need of updating.

- The Kansas Vision Screening Guidelines, which were last revised in 2004, were updated in 2018, and used evidence-based screening tools and procedures to create age-specific recommendations.
- These guidelines, which were created and reviewed by optometrists, ophthalmologists, school nurses, educators, community volunteers and members of the Kansas Vision Coalition Task Force, were released early in 2019.
- The guidelines will lead to changes in current practice, including in some cases the use of different screening tools and the use of personnel trained in appropriate screening protocols. The cost to schools for these updated tools is not believed to be significant, but there will be some cost for the tools and additional training of vision screeners.

2. Evidence-based practice regarding vision screening has changed significantly.

- Committee members believe that evidence-based screening tools and procedures are critical to consistent and reliable identification of potential vision problems. Screening tools must be age-

appropriate and administered by individuals with appropriate training and understanding of the equipment and protocols.

- For example, current research dictates that instrument-based screeners are only recommended for children under 6 years of age, and for older children who cannot participate in optotype-based screening, not on the broad pediatric population.

3. Shortcomings needed to be addressed in current Kansas Vision Screening Laws and Regulations

- The original Kansas Vision Screening Laws and Regulations were established by the Kansas Legislature in 1959 with a minor change in 2001.
- As part of the review of current screening practices, the committee recognized that the existing statutes and regulations reflect neither the current evidence-based practices and requirements for vision screenings for preschoolers, nor a systematic method of regularly reviewing and updating these guidelines as technology and research change. The existing language also required schools to provide vision screenings once every two years, but weren't specific to what years that took place, which has the potential of causing a student transferring districts to go several years between screenings.
- The proposed language developed by the committee allows for the flexibility of changes to the guidelines as technology and research about vision and learning develops. The language brings the vision screening frequency more in line with current hearing screening frequency, and changes the requirement for vision screening for every student enrolled in a school district or accredited nonpublic school from the current of "not less than once every two years" to annually in:
 - Preschool
 - Kindergarten
 - Grades 1,2, 3, 5, 7, and 10
 - Students new-to-Kansas/districts in grades not requiring screening
- In addition, it addresses appropriate referrals for comprehensive vision and eye health evaluations and establishes a commission to regularly review the guidelines, outcomes and protocols and make recommendations regarding screening policies and procedures.

The coalition believes that these minor changes to the statutes relating to school-administered vision screening will help make sure that school-administered screenings are standardized in how and when they are provided, as well as allowing for the more frequent review and revision of the school screening guidelines to reflect updates in research and technology. We ask for your support in passing SB 62 out of committee.

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