

SURVEY REVEALS CONCERNS OVER CHILDREN'S VISION AND EYE HEALTH AS MORE CLASSROOMS GO HIGH-TECH

3D imaging and digital devices require optimal visual capabilities and eye health

Madison, WI – Classrooms around the country are becoming increasingly high-tech, and teachers are incorporating 3D imaging, digital devices and the latest computer applications into their daily curriculum. While these devices can greatly enhance learning, they also increase the importance of proper vision and eye health of our students.

According to the American Optometric Association's (AOA) 2011 American Eye-Q® survey, parents have growing concerns about the effects of evolving technology in the classroom. Fifty-three percent of respondents with children 18 or younger believe 3D viewing is harmful to a child's vision or eyes, and 29 percent of parents feel very concerned that their child may damage their eyes due to prolonged use of computers or hand-held electronic devices.

"Today's classroom technology is extremely visual, making it critical for students to maintain excellent eye health," advised Dr. Lisa Slaby, a Green Bay doctor of optometry and President of the Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA). "A patient's binocular vision, focusing abilities, as well as their ability to see near and far should be checked by an eye doctor yearly, particularly as students head back to school."

Among the newest technologies, three-dimensional imaging is quickly making its way into the classroom, allowing for virtual tours of museums or views from inside the human heart. According to a new report from the AOA, research on the learning benefits of using 3D in the classroom is still in its infancy; however, early findings indicate that focus, attention span, retention, classroom behavior, and achievement gains are all seeing improvement.

The use of 3D imagery in schools compounds the already high usage of computer technology in today's classroom. State-of-the-art computer labs are now a mainstream affair at many schools; students often use laptops, tablets and other digital devices throughout the school day. According to the AOA's American Eye-Q® survey, 62 percent of parents estimate their child spends one to four hours using a computer, video game, mp3 player or hand-held electronic device each day.

Unfortunately, prolonged use of these technologies can cause eye strain, headaches, fatigue, burning or tired eyes, loss of focus, blurred vision, double vision or head and neck pain. The AOA calls this condition Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS). CVS occurs when eye or vision problems related to near work are experienced during or related to using digital devices. "The continued popularity and use of computers and digital devices in the classroom certainly poses a number of challenges to the visual system," said Dr. Slaby. "Many of these issues can be solved with good ergonomics and yearly, comprehensive eye exams by an optometrist."

Students can help avoid CVS by practicing the 20-20-20 rule. At least every 20 minutes, take a 20-second break and view something 20 feet away. Studies show that people need to rest their eyes to keep them moist. Plus, staring off into the distance helps the eyes from locking into a close-up position. It is also recommended that students take a 15-minute break for every two hours spent on computers or other digital devices.

Early detection and treatment are key in correcting vision problems and helping students see clearly. For more information on 3D vision, or to download a copy of "3D in the Classroom – An AOA Report," visit www.3deyehealth.org. For additional information on children's vision and the importance of back-to-school eye exams, please visit www.woa-eyes.org.

About the American Eye-Q® survey:

The sixth annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From May 19 – 23, 2011, using an online methodology, PSB interviewed 1,000 Americans 18 years and older who embodied a nationally representative sample of the U.S. general population (Margin of error at 95 percent confidence level).

About the Wisconsin Optometric Association: *The Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) is a nonprofit affiliation of licensed doctors of optometry and associated businesses dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of the vision welfare of the people of Wisconsin. The WOA accomplishes its goals through: Education and dissemination of information, organized governmental activity, legislation and regulation, mediation with consumer and public interest groups, and provision of collective benefits to its members. Approximately 650 doctors of optometry are currently members of the WOA, located in nearly every county in the state. All members must be licensed and certified to practice optometry by the State of Wisconsin. The WOA also maintains an affiliation with the American Optometric Association (AOA). For more information, visit WOA's website at www.woa-eyes.org.*