

Dear Committee Members,

Early detection and intervention of visual issues have been critical in helping both my students and my own daughter become more fluent readers. I have been a primary teacher for the last 15 years. During those years, I have taught over 300 kids to read. Every year, inevitably, there are one or two students who, even with good instruction, extra reading intervention within the school setting, a support system at home to help, and hard work and perseverance from the child, are still finding it hard to become fluent readers. My daughter was one of these children. No matter how much extra time she was receiving from her teacher, extra one on one time from the Reading Specialist, and hours of nightly reading work at home with my assistance, she was not getting it. I, as a teacher, had the reading strategies and experience to help her, as I had helped countless other children, but for whatever reason it just wasn't 'clicking'. Thankfully her teacher and I had been trained by Dr. Clark and her team to spot the signs of a child who needed extra vision screening to detect whether her eyes were working properly together, not just seeing 20/20. Unfortunately, though, because it is not something that is routinely done for all students and our primary training is in education and not optometry, we only thought to utilize our training to screen her after all the usual educational avenues of intervention had been exhausted. Thankfully we did catch it early enough that, now in 2nd grade, my daughter is reading at grade level and enjoying reading. Due to her success with correcting her vision, reading is no longer a struggle.

My daughter's story is only one of countless children who have been turned into readers because of early detection. Catching her vision issues early has given her the gift of reading that will be instrumental in the level of success she can attain as an adult. Research suggests that students who are not on grade level by 3rd grade have a decreased graduation rate and an increased rate to live in poverty as an adult. Early intervention matters in all forms. Kids who are caught in Kindergarten through 3rd grade when they are still learning to read instead of reading to learn can make remarkable gains in school across all subject areas once their vision issues are diagnosed and treated.

I have seen this first hand time and time again with my students. I could list names for the entirety of the next paragraph of students who have been helped by early detection. Kids who have the reading strategies, are bright and hard-working but we just can't seem to figure out why reading is coming so hard to them typically end up being diagnosed with some sort of visual issue. It is critical to check for vision issues with a comprehensive exam prior to searching for more intensive intervention like Special Ed. Services. Imagine the time, resources, and frustration saved if screenings were more widely done (every grade level in the primary grades) and not just when we as teachers have beat our heads against the wall time and time again to figure out why a student is not making the gains we know they are capable of making.

I urge you to update the school vision screening laws to include screenings at every grade level in the primary grades. Thank you for your time.

Jessica King

Kindergarten Teacher

USD 298 Lincoln Public Schools