Your child's vision is a strong indicator of her success in school.

More Than Meets the Eye

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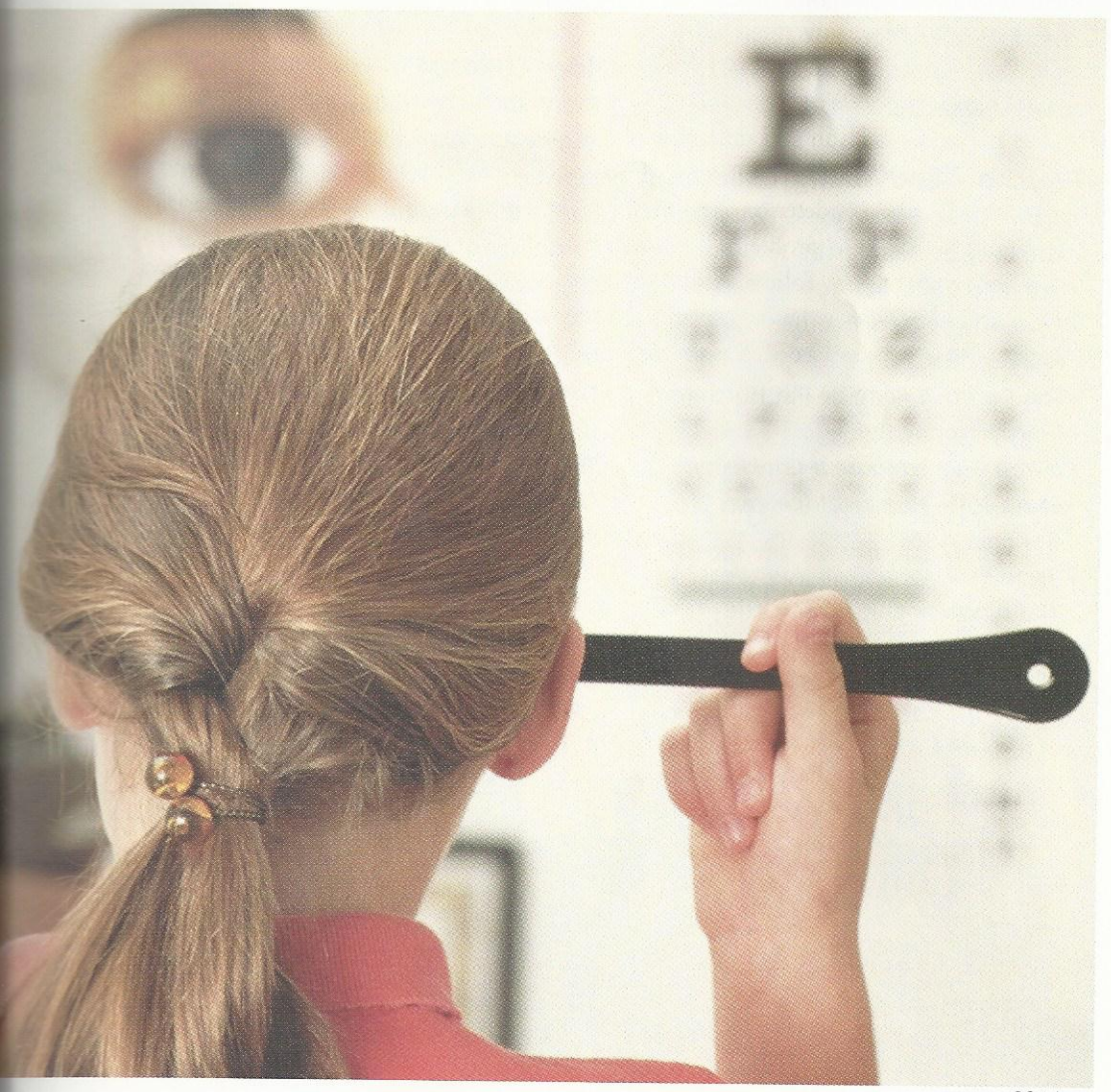

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As school begins, parents typically compile a list of necessary items for school success. The list usually includes school supplies, back-to-school clothes, proof of immunizations, and an annual physical.

A comprehensive vision examination may never appear on the list, but your child's vision is one of the strongest indicators of academic success in school. Over 18 million children will enter school without a visual examination.[1] Undetected visual problems can be misdiagnosed as ADD, dyslexia, and learning disabilities.

Eye-Opening Statistics

Dr. Steven Miller, Executive Director of the College of Optometrists in Vision Development (COVD), says: "The biggest concern is that too many children are mislabeled and misdiagnosed as having a learning disability or Attention Deficit Disorder. In reality, these children have a correctable visual problem."[2]

Before you are satisfied with a pediatrician-performed eye chart screening, it is imperative to understand that vision is different from 20/20 eyesight. Vision skills begin at birth and develop as large and small motor skills do. These skills are developmental and can be checked as early as 3 years of age and again as a child enters kindergarten. Proper screenings determine the readiness of a child for the challenging vision tasks required in school.

Parent and Therapist

Last year as school began, I did not realize how important visual skills were to school performance. As my son began second grade, I noticed changes in his school work. My bright and enthusiastic child was resisting writing. His head rested on the paper. His handwriting deteriorated. His papers came home incomplete with answers jumbled together.

I assumed he could correct himself if I pointed out the problem. Maybe he just needed to slow down and work harder. After spending many tearful hours doing homework with him, I realized something was not right.

As a mother, I saw my son's frustration. I envisioned him as an adult struggling in a job one day with simple mistakes or incorrect spelling. My heart began to break. I feared the negative labels that he may have to face as a result of this problem.

Vision disorders are the number one handicapping condition of children.

As an occupational therapist, I saw my child in need of intervention. Therapy is always required when a child's performance does not match ability. All children can succeed in school with proper adaptation to their needs. With this mind-set, I would not stop searching until I found the reason for his problem.

Vision Evaluation and Therapy

Through much prayer as a mother and a therapist, God gave me an answer to my son's struggle in an unlikely way. One day I was discussing my son's increasing difficulty at school with a cousin.

Our conversation led to a conversation with a physician who listened to the description of my son's struggles. The doctor educated me on my son's "hidden disability." We were soon scheduled for a complete visual examination.

I discovered at my son's examination that there are a few simple questions designed to help parents determine if their child may have a vision problem. If you answer *yes* to any of the following questions, your child may have a vision problem:

- Does my child like to read, or does he only read when he has to?
- Does my child lose his place when he reads?
- Does my child have poor reading comprehension?

In my son's case, a thorough examination revealed binocular vision problems. Overall, my son's visual system was operating at 50 percent less than normal, but he did not know his vision was different from anyone else's. Therapy was prescribed for three to four times per week over a six-month period.

Keeping an Eye Out for Problems

As therapy has progressed, my son's visual skills are improving. Through home schooling, we are able to adapt his work to meet his needs and specialize a program to encourage daily success. We feel blessed to have discovered this problem early.

If your child is struggling in school, do not hesitate to get a comprehensive visual examination. Never accept quick labels, because when it comes to school performance, there is more than meets the eye. ■

Eyesight Versus Vision

The following chart indicates that a child can have 20/20 eyesight and still have vision problems that limit his ability to learn.

Eyesight	Vision
Eyesight is a child's ability to see clearly at a distance.	Vision is the complex functional ability of both eyes working together with the brain to interpret information at near distances.
Each eye is tested separately in a physician's office with the standard 20/20 eye chart.	Visual skill can only be tested by a behavioral optometrist.
Eyesight is used 10 to 20 percent of the time in a classroom, such as when a child focuses on the board in the front of the room.	Vision skills tested involve activities used in 80 to 90 percent of the time in a classroom, such as when a child reads out loud, writes, copies from the board, reads for comprehension, takes tests, completes worksheets, or does spelling and other homework assignments.

Find Out More

Parents can view an informational list of signs and symptoms that may indicate a problem, find a qualified vision specialist, or obtain further information at these Web sites:

- College of Optometrists in Vision Development — *www.covd.org* — Includes helpful examples of what a child with vision problems may actually see
- Parents Active for Vision Education (P.A.V.E.®) — *www.pavevision.org*

[1]College of Optometrists in Vision Development, "Undetected Learning-Related Vision Problems – Key Issues," *www.covd.org/od/public.html.*
[2]Dr. Steven Miller, interview by Tracey Russell.

Tracey Russell is an Occupational Therapist committed to share the life-giving principles of God's Word combined with rehabilitation skills to strengthen the heart of the family. She is a graduate of the Proverbs 31 Ministry Speaker and Writer Program. Mostly, she is developing a ministry and rehabilitation practice for her husband and three boys in her home.