

An “Eye-Opening” Shift In Classroom Learning

(NAPSA)—Computers and Smart Boards are a common staple in today's classrooms, and with programs like “bring your own device” to school, smartphones and tablets are also seeing increased use in schools. The use of technology both in and out of the classroom has many benefits for students, but it can also take a toll on their eye health and vision if proper precautions aren't followed.

According to the American Optometric Association's (AOA) 2013 American Eye-Q survey, 85 percent of parents indicate their children use electronic devices up to four hours per day. The survey also indicates that 41 percent of children have their own smartphone or tablet and 32 percent use both e-books and textbooks at school. Additionally, 66 percent of children use a computer or tablet to do homework or study. With the consistent use of electronic devices both in and out of school, children of all ages can face a number of visual challenges.

Frequent, prolonged use of technology can lead to a temporary condition called computer vision syndrome, or CVS. Symptoms may include eyestrain, headaches, fatigue, burning or tired eyes, loss of focus, blurred vision, double vision or head and neck pain. To rest eyes, students should follow the 20-20-20 rule—take a 20-second break every 20 minutes and view something 20 feet away.

As the use of electronic devices increases, eye doctors are providing age-specific tips and warning signs for parents and teachers to



Two-thirds of today's students use electronic devices for schoolwork, which could cause computer vision syndrome.

be on the lookout for this school year that may indicate an undiagnosed vision problem or CVS:

• **Preschool/Kindergarten Children:** Limit tech time to two hours or less and increase screen font size. During this stage, parents should also be aware of physical signs that may flag a potential vision problem, such as:

- Improper eye alignment or if one or both eyes turn inward or outward
- Excessive blinking or eye rubbing when children do near work
- Difficulty recognizing colors, shapes, letters and numbers.

• **Elementary School Children:** Encourage kids to use smartphones only for quick tasks such as texting, and to position devices half an arm's length away—slightly below eye level. Parents should ask children at this age:

- Do words “swim” on a screen or in a book? Do they lose their place frequently when reading?

• Does the child experience frequent headaches during the school week or while performing near work?

• Are the child's grades high in nonvisual classes and lower in other, more visually focused classes like math or reading?

• **Middle/High School Children:** Remind students that computers should be positioned 20 to 28 inches away from their eyes, with the top of the screen at eye level. Background settings on smartphones should be adjusted to keep vision comfortable. To stay involved with children's vision, parents should ask:

• How long can my children read before they need to take a visual break?

• Does my child perform with a lowered level of comprehension?

• Does my child experience discomfort or fatigue or have a short attention span?

Additional warning signs include:

• Squinting while reading or watching television

• Turning or tilting the head or covering an eye

• Consistently performing below potential or struggling to complete homework

• Having behavioral problems.

The AOA recommends that a child's first eye exam take place at 6 months of age, then at age 3, again before kindergarten and yearly thereafter. To find an optometrist nearby, or for additional information on children's vision and the importance of eye exams, visit www.aoa.org.