

2/1/2021

To: Oregon Senate Committee on Education

I am writing to support SB 222, which will provide \$1.5 million in funding for ODE's School Vision Screening Fund for the 2021-2023 biennium. I have had the privilege of serving the children of Oregon as a pediatric eye care provider for nearly 30 years and I am a member of the Vision Screening Task Force for the Oregon Department of Education. We have a very unique vision screening program in Oregon, mostly because we have such an active and effective group of non-profit organizations dedicated to serving the interests of our children. The Oregon Lions Foundation has been taken the lead in this endeavor, providing vision screenings for approximately 180,000 Oregon students each year prior to the onset of the pandemic. My research team at Pacific University has been conducting multi-year studies to evaluate the efficacy of the Lions screening in regards to how well the screening detects the high priority vision conditions. We have also been looking at the relationship between vision screening results and academic achievement using 3rd grade ELA and MATH test results from schools across the state. We have found a clear relationship. Schools with more vision screening failures have lower standardized state test scores, even when controlling for socioeconomic factors such as the percentage of students who qualify for Free or Reduced Lunch. We also looked at individual test scores of students who pass versus fail vision screening in the Salem Keizer District and found an even more striking relationship. Here is a short summary of our findings:

- Data collected from 3rd grade students in Salem/Keizer District who were screened by Oregon Lions Foundation in spring of 2018 and 2019
- 670 of 5045 (13.3%) of students failed one or more aspects of the vision screening (SPOT Photoscreener)
- Compared 3rd grade state Assessment scores in English Language Arts and Math between students who passed vs failed the vision screening
- Children who failed the vision screening performed 13-17% lower (median scores) than those who pass the vision screening on both the English Language Arts and Math tests
- Children with the most significant vision conditions or multiple vision conditions perform about 20% lower than average.

Our findings are consistent with the research on vision and learning going back to the 1930s and underscores the importance of detecting and treating vision problems as early as possible. There are many factors that affect school performance but correcting vision problems is relatively easy and cost-effective compared to other educational interventions. Most children have access to vision care with health insurance coverage but parents and teachers are unaware these vision problems exist. We are working with several non-profits to make sure those children who most need vision care do not slip through the cracks after screening. However, we cannot help children whose vision problems remain undetected. SB 222 will ensure funding continues to support our most at risk students by eliminating the barrier of visual impairment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John P. Lowery". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

John P Lowery, OD, MEd
Professor, Chief of Pediatrics, Pacific University College of Optometry
Director, Oregon Lions Statewide Low Vision Clinic

