



VISION&LEARNINGNEWS

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## A Summer Solution For a Poor Report

As a parent, I have felt the frustration of my children's report cards not reflecting their potential. And I know that I am not alone, as this is a common theme I hear quite a bit about in my office, especially around this time of year. Whether it is your child checking into summer early, or another issue, something that should be examined is vision—especially as we slip into the summer months,

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when kids have the potential for regression. When a sharp student is not performing at expected levels, a thorough vision evaluation is warranted.

However, diagnosing and treating the vision problem is often only the first step in the process. I believe in an integrated approach of vision therapy and tutoring. According to the American Optometric Association, 60 percent of problem learners have undiagnosed vision problems contributing to their challenges. In my experience, children who struggle with reading and learning often have underlying eye coordination and

eye movement problems, and once these vision problems are corrected, tutoring can be the link to catching up to classmates.

One vision problem, convergence insufficiency (CI), is often the culprit. CI is a common eye coordination condition that affects how the eyes work together when doing ‘near’ work, like reading. Both eyes must converge (turn in together) for all the words to be clear and single. In some children, this visual skill can be developmentally delayed. And unfortunately, there are no obvious signs, which is why it is missed by most vision screenings. Fortunately, it is something that can be corrected relatively easily without surgery by a series of sessions to help retrain the brain to work with the muscles of the eyes.

Once the brain and eyes are working as a team, we can begin ‘catching’ patients up to grade level, and this is where tutoring becomes critical. This is especially pertinent during summer vacation, when kids lose on average 2.8 months of skills learned during the school year.

Most importantly, I have seen the effects of the combination of optometric vision therapy and tutoring in many of my patients. A recent example is a patient that came to me after her sister had successfully completed a vision therapy program. Ashley was struggling with reading, and her mom knew, due to

her older sister, that something was amiss. She brought Ashley in for an eye exam and subsequently a developmental vision evaluation with our vision therapist, Ursula Smith, and a reading assessment with our reading specialist, Donna Hanisch. We placed Ashley in a program that combined both vision therapy and reading tutoring to help bring her up to grade level.

Ashley's mom was thrilled, saying, “Ashley has done vision therapy and reading tutoring ever since the end of 6<sup>th</sup> grade. She is now in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and there have been significant results. Her grades have accelerated, and she now enjoys reading and school! At the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, she had a major problem with tracking. Both of these programs combined have made such a difference on Ashley's grades and schoolwork.”

I know it is hard for parents to identify the exact reason as to why their child is struggling. As our children grow and develop, we are constantly looking for those cues that give us some indication of how to help and even whether help is needed. Vision and learning problems are not always easily identifiable. But there are a few pointers, which if detected by a parent or teacher could immensely help your child.

One of the easiest ways to identify children who have a visual component to their academic challenges is to compare their verbal performance to their reading and/or writing performance. For example, many parents will tell me that they can't understand why their child is so bright when they talk with them or read to them, yet when the child

reads or writes, performance declines.

There are other vision related markers that your child may have a vision problem that is contributing to his or her difficulty with reading and learning, including:

- Skipping/repeating lines when reading
- Poor reading comprehension
- Homework taking longer than it should
- Headaches at the end of the day
- Trouble keeping attention on reading
- Difficulty completing assignments on time
- Difficulty copying from board
- Tilting the head/closing one eye when reading
- One eye turning in or out
- Avoiding near work/reading
- Holding reading material too close
- Poor handwriting

If your child has any of these symptoms, there is a strong possibility that a treatable vision problem is contributing to his or her difficulties. Dependent upon the scope of the problem, these issues can often be treated over the summer, which will give your child a better start to the new school year next fall.

The summer is a great time to give your child that extra academic push. Whether your kid is in need of honing his or her skills in math or reading or needs help in improving fluency and comprehension, know that there is help available. We offer math and reading camps over the summer to keep skills sharp and prevent any academic regression. See our advertisement, and here's to a great summer vacation!

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