



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **More Than One In Five 12 to 17-Year-Olds Have Trouble Seeing in Class**

### ***Survey Finds Most Children Under The Age of 6 Have Never had an Eye Exam***

**Rancho Cordova, Calif., August 4, 2009** – VSP<sup>®</sup> Vision Care and Prevent Blindness America announced today the results of their joint nationwide survey of nearly 1,500 participants. The study revealed more than one in five 12 to 17-year-olds have difficulty seeing the classroom whiteboard/chalkboard, with more than one in four complaining of headaches. These complaints are noted even though nearly half (45 percent) of the children in this age group reported wearing some type of prescription eyewear.

“The survey provides a clear example of why regular eye exams are so important as children progress in school,” said Gary Brooks, VSP Vision Care President. “Most parents probably assume once a prescription is given, there isn’t a need for further follow up. However, the survey results reinforce the need for regular eye exams as kids’ eyes continue to change and adapt. There are growing demands on their vision as they advance academically. The headaches the older children are experiencing may be a natural result of their eyes experiencing more strain and stress but not receiving updated prescriptions to accommodate the changes.”

#### **Additional findings of the survey show that:**

- Almost two-thirds (66 percent) of children under the age of six have never had an eye exam by an eye doctor.
- One in four 6 to 11-year-olds wears prescription glasses.
- The prevalence of common eye conditions, as reported by parents, increases with the child’s age.

The most common vision problem in older children is nearsightedness, also called myopia. This is a vision condition in which close objects are seen clearly, but objects farther away, like a chalkboard, appear blurred. As part of Children’s Eye Health and Safety Month in August, VSP and Prevent Blindness America hope to educate parents and caregivers on the importance of vision care and encourage them to make their children’s eye health a priority.

Prevent Blindness America recommends all children have their vision checked at infancy and regularly throughout childhood. If a child fails a vision screening, or if there is any concern of an eye or vision problem, the child should be referred for a complete eye exam by an eye doctor (ophthalmologist or optometrist). The combination of primary care doctor eye evaluations and vision screenings with a referral for a complete eye exam by an eye doctor is the recommendation of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Ophthalmology and the American Association for the Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus.

“The good news is that most common eye problems in older children, including myopia, can be effectively treated if diagnosed early,” said Hugh R. Parry, president and CEO of Prevent Blindness America. “We urge all parents and caregivers to have their child’s vision checked regularly to promote a lifetime of healthy vision.”

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The American Optometric Association recommends that all children have a complete eye exam by an eye doctor at age 6 months, 3 years and 5 years. Between the ages of 6 and 18, the AOA recommends that visits to an eye doctor should occur at least every two years, or more if recommended by an eye doctor.

“It is imperative for children, starting as early as 6 months, to receive comprehensive eye exams on a regular basis to maintain their health and ensure academic success,” states Dr. Leanne Liddicoat, a VSP Vision Care optometrist. “It’s estimated that 80 percent of what a child learns is through vision.”

For additional eyecare tips and information, visit VSP’s Eyecare Discovery Center at [www.vsp.com](http://www.vsp.com) and Prevent Blindness America at [www.preventblindness.org](http://www.preventblindness.org).

In the last 10 years, VSP has built a strong relationship with Prevent Blindness America through VSP’s Sight for Students program. This partnership has resulted in the referral of over 140,000 children to a VSP eye doctor for comprehensive eye exams and eyewear for a total funding of almost \$18 million for children whose families are unable to afford access to eyecare.

#### **About the Survey**

The VSP and Prevent Blindness America Consumer Eyewear and Eyecare Survey was fielded in May 2009. There were 1,499 U.S. residents age 18 and older who participated.

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#### **About the VSP Global**

*VSP® Global includes VSP Vision Care, the largest not-for-profit vision benefits and services company in the United States with 55 million members; Marchon® Eyewear Inc., one of the world’s largest manufacturers, designers and distributors of quality fashion and technologically-advanced eyewear and sunwear; Eyefinity®/Officemate® which offer innovative solutions and the premier management software and technology to improve overall practice management and patient experience; VSP Labs, industry leaders in new technologies, production processes, service and logistics.*

*Since 1997, VSP has provided more than 529,500 low-income, uninsured children with free eyecare. Through relationships including those with the American Diabetes Association and Prevent Blindness America, VSP promotes the importance of annual eye exams for maintaining eye health and overall wellness.*

#### **About Prevent Blindness America**

*Founded in 1908, Prevent Blindness America is the nation’s leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. Focused on promoting a continuum of vision care, Prevent Blindness America touches the lives of millions of people each year through public and professional education, advocacy, certified vision screening and training, community and patient service programs and research. These services are made possible through the generous support of the American public. Together with a network of affiliates, divisions and chapters, Prevent Blindness America is committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For more information, or to make a contribution to the sight-saving fund, call 1-800-331-2020.*