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AOA, School Nurses Partner to Link Healthy Vision and Improved Classroom Learning

New Strategic Alliance Will Help Ensure that No Child is Left Behind Due to an Untreated or Undiagnosed Vision Problem

Washington, D.C. (December 10, 2008) — The American Optometric Association (AOA), the voice for more than 36,000 frontline providers of eye and vision care nationwide, formed a new partnership today with the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) aimed at developing and implementing strategies to ensure that school-aged children have increased access to comprehensive vision care.

In a joint Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by AOA Executive Director, Barry Barresi, OD, PhD, and NASN Executive Director, Amy Garcia, RN, MSN, the two national organizations pledged to develop and implement programs that will increase the level of awareness, understanding, and appreciation for the importance of eye and vision health to the education and overall physical, mental, and social well-being of America's school-aged children.

According to the National Parent Teacher Association, ten million children suffer from vision disorders. Vision disorders are considered one of the most common disabilities in the United States, and they are one of the most prevalent handicapping conditions in childhood. Undetected and untreated vision deficiencies, particularly in children, can take a large toll. Studies have shown that the costs associated with adult vision problems in the U.S. are at \$51.4 billion

“Experts believe that more than 80 percent of what children learn in their early school years is visual. Providing improved access to comprehensive vision care will better equip America's children with the tools they need to succeed in school and later in life,” said Peter H. Kehoe, OD, AOA President. “As our nation's school nurses carry out their important mission of coordinating and monitoring the health and well-being of America's school-aged children, doctors of optometry will be increasingly committed to help ensure that no child is left behind due to an undiagnosed or untreated vision problem.”

The MOU is the latest in a series of relationship-building projects between the AOA and the NASN. In June the AOA House of Delegates passed a resolution calling for

increased recognition and support for school nurses. In addition to the MOU signing, AOA's Dr. Barresi presented a plaque of the school nurse resolution passed by the AOA House of Delegates in June to the NASN delegation at the AOA Washington office on December 4. (photo attached)

America's school nurses provide triage and referral of many primary eye and vision care conditions to the nation's doctors of optometry, including strabismus, retinoblastoma, and other serious and potentially blinding problems that can lead to poor school performance and other issues that can ultimately affect quality of life. While amblyopia is treatable and preventable if caught within the early years of a child's life, it remains the leading cause of vision loss in Americans under age 4.

About the American Optometric Association (AOA)

The American Optometric Association represents approximately 36,000 doctors of optometry, optometry students and paraoptometric assistants and technicians. Optometrists serve patients in nearly 6,500 communities across the country, and in 3,500 of those communities are the only eye doctors. Doctors of optometry provide two-thirds of all primary eye care in the United States.

American Optometric Association doctors of optometry are highly qualified, trained doctors on the frontline of eye and vision care who examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases and disorders of the eye. In addition to providing eye and vision care, optometrists play a major role in a patient's overall health and well-being by detecting systemic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension.

Prior to optometry school, optometrists typically complete four years of undergraduate study, culminating in a bachelor's degree. Required undergraduate coursework for pre-optometry students is extensive and covers a wide variety of advanced health, science and mathematics. Optometry school consists of four years of post-graduate, doctoral study concentrating on both the eye and systemic health. In addition to their formal training, doctors of optometry must undergo annual continuing education to stay current on the latest standards of care. For more information, visit www.aoa.org.

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