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Investment in vision screening will help struggling students

SB 187 allocates resources to cover vision screening for Oregon's students

SALEM – With many children struggling early in their school years due to undiagnosed vision issues, a simple investment can make a world of difference for thousands of Oregon's young people.

Senate Bill 187 – which passed the Senate today on a 30-0 vote – helps to address that issue by allocating \$1 million to cover vision screenings for students in public school districts and preschools statewide.

“There are too many cases where young children struggle learning at an early age, due to vision issues,” said Sen. Richard Devlin (D-Tualatin), who carried the bill in the Senate. “When children struggle early in school, it can send them down a path of disenfranchisement with their own education, as well as erode their confidence and hopes for the future. We can stop this trend by identifying and correcting vision issues early.”

The bill establishes the Vision Health Account and directs Oregon Department of Education to reimburse public schools and preschool programs for any costs associated with vision screening for students. It also allows the Oregon Department of Education to designate non-profit providers to administer the screenings and adopt administrative rules for prioritizing grants if reimbursement requests exceed the allotted amount. Gifts and outside grants can be used to supplement the account, which will include \$1 million in state funding.

Vision is critical to a child's ability to learn, as 80 percent of all learning during a child's first 12 years comes through vision, according to written testimony submitted by the Oregon Optometric Physicians Association during the committee process. That same document adds

that 25 percent of school-age children have vision problems, and 60 percent of students identified as problem learners have undetected vision problems. The picture gets more bleak, according to the report, when vision problems go undiagnosed, as 70 percent of juvenile offenders have undiagnosed vision problems.

“As a former high school principal and teacher, I can’t overstate the value of catching vision issues early so that we can correct them and kids can work to their potential,” said Sen. Arnie Roblan (D-Coos Bay), a chief co-sponsor of the bill. “Once a student begins to believe that he or she is not able to keep up in school – even though with vision correction they would be doing just fine – it can have a devastating impact on their academic future and career prospects. Sometimes, it turns out, a student is far more capable than their performance shows, but vision correction makes all the difference in the world. This bill will help school districts identify vision issues early to help keep kids on the right path.”

Senate Bill 187 now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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