



Vision Screening Guidance for Preschool through 12th Grade

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Office of Exceptional Children provides this guidance for vision screenings for any purpose. Please note this guidance replaces any past guidance including *The Guiding Practices in Early Childhood Vision Screening document*.

SECTION 3. G.S. 130A-440.1 reads Early Childhood Vision Care. (a) Vision Screening Required for Children Entering Kindergarten – “Every child in this State entering kindergarten in the public schools, shall obtain vision screening.”

While vision screening is required for Kindergarten in North Carolina, it may be part of wellness activities conducted by Public School Units (PSU) in other grades and supports the [NC Healthy Schools](#) and Whole Schools, Whole Community, Whole Child model endorsed by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. The American Academy of Pediatrics and Bright Futures have a [periodicity table](#) recommending when vision screenings should occur in the medical home. PSUs may want to consider this schedule as it is important to identify concerns related to visual access of educational materials throughout the grade spans. Remember, any time a mass screening is implemented, schools will want to inform parents that it will take place, obtain relevant consent, and provide results to parents in addition to the need for follow up assessment or treatment.

Vision Screening Definition

A vision screening is a brief assessment to identify children with possible visual concerns, traditionally using an eye chart (based on age), to determine near and far acuities. For students who are unable to participate using an eye chart, consider reviewing other [common tools for vision screenings](#).

Mass Vision Screening

Who conducts vision screening as a part of a mass screening?

Vision screenings are performed by an individual trained in the specific techniques used for that screening.

In NC, mass screenings are often conducted by school nurses or persons trained by Prevent Blindness North Carolina (PBNC). PBNC has a [Preschool Vision Screening Program](#) that provides



on-site vision screenings free of charge for preschool students. PBNC also has a no cost [School-age Training and Certification Program](#) that certifies screeners in the fundamentals of vision screening techniques, referral, and follow-up.

According to PBNC, “Without training and certification, there is the potential for under-referral and inconsistency in screening that can drive inequalities in children’s vision, eye care, and eye health across the state.” There is also an equal concern that students may be over referred to eye care specialists placing a potential burden on schools and families.

Vision Screening Requirements

Vision screenings should always be conducted in accordance with the specific assessment’s guidelines. Individuals with documented vision loss shall not be excluded from the vision screening process. Additionally, if a student wears prescription glasses the student should be screened wearing the prescription glasses, if available, and documented appropriately. Students screened wearing prescription lenses should not also be screened without them.

Passed Vision Screening

Criteria for passing differs by age and type of screening tool administered. Screeners should be aware of the criteria to accurately document passing.

Failed Vision Screening

Criteria for a failed vision screening differs by age and type of screening tool administered. If a student fails a vision screening, it is recommended by the [North Carolina School Health Program Manual](#) that the student be rescreened by the school nurse to “help minimize unnecessary referrals”. If the results of the screening suggest that a vision problem may be present, the school district should determine the appropriate professional to follow-up with the parent to discuss the results and possible referral to an eye care professional.



Recommended Referrals and Documentation

Pursuant to SECTION 3. G.S. 130A-440.1 (a1), if a public school teacher, administrator, or other appropriate school personnel has reason to believe that a child enrolled in kindergarten through third grade is having problems with vision, the school personnel may recommend to the child's parent that the child have a comprehensive eye examination.

Mass screenings are an excellent way to determine if a child may be experiencing vision difficulties. When conducting a mass screening at any grade level, the following referral and documentation guidelines should be considered:

1. A referral to a licensed optometrist or ophthalmologist for a comprehensive eye examination must be recommended if:
 - a. an individual fails the vision screening on no more than two attempts with each attempt separated by at least 5 days on any presentation.
 - b. after a good faith attempt to screen, reliable and valid results cannot be obtained for any reason
 - c. relevant medical information in the student health record indicates a need for a referral
2. The recommendation for a referral for a comprehensive eye examination must be documented.
3. Individuals with documented vision loss should follow the recommendations of their licensed vision care provider and may not need to be referred for a comprehensive eye examination.

After a referral has been made for a comprehensive eye examination and while awaiting information, interventions, if appropriate, should not be delayed, nor should Child Find obligations be neglected.

Vision Screening as part of an IDEA Evaluation

A vision screening must be completed during the evaluation process for special education for those areas of eligibility where it is required as part of the data to determine eligibility.



Vision screenings data should be considered as a part of the review of existing data for students being referred for special education. A vision screening must be completed when it is a required component of the data used during the evaluation process.

When a student is referred for special education, written consent to evaluate must be obtained from the parent. If a student fails a vision screening during the IDEA evaluation process or is involved in a comprehensive ophthalmologic or optometric evaluation, all evaluations for which consent was obtained must continue and not be delayed due to waiting on the results of the ophthalmologic or optometric evaluation. The use of compensatory strategies and multimodal presentation of materials for all evaluations should be used.

Given the results of the ophthalmologic or optometric evaluation, teams may want to consider obtaining information for additional assessments if needed. A Teacher of the Visually Impaired and Orientation and Mobility Specialist are professionals whose scope of practice includes assessing visual related concerns.

Who conducts Vision Screening as part of IDEA evaluations?

Vision screenings are performed by an individual trained in the specific techniques used for that screening.

Who conducts Ophthalmologic or Optometric evaluation as part of IDEA evaluations?

NC 1500-2.14 states that an ophthalmological or optometric evaluation is an evaluation by an ophthalmologist or optometrist to determine visual acuity and function and whether or not magnification is needed.

Environmental Considerations

Vision screenings should take place in an area that will not interfere with the reliability and validity of vision screening results. Please refer to the individual screening tool instructions for guidance about appropriate administration.



Additional Resources

- Some additional resources for schools are available through [Prevent Blindness North Carolina's Resources for Vision Screeners](#).
- [Considerations for Vision Screening Tools](#) Password: Tools4VS