

Ohio

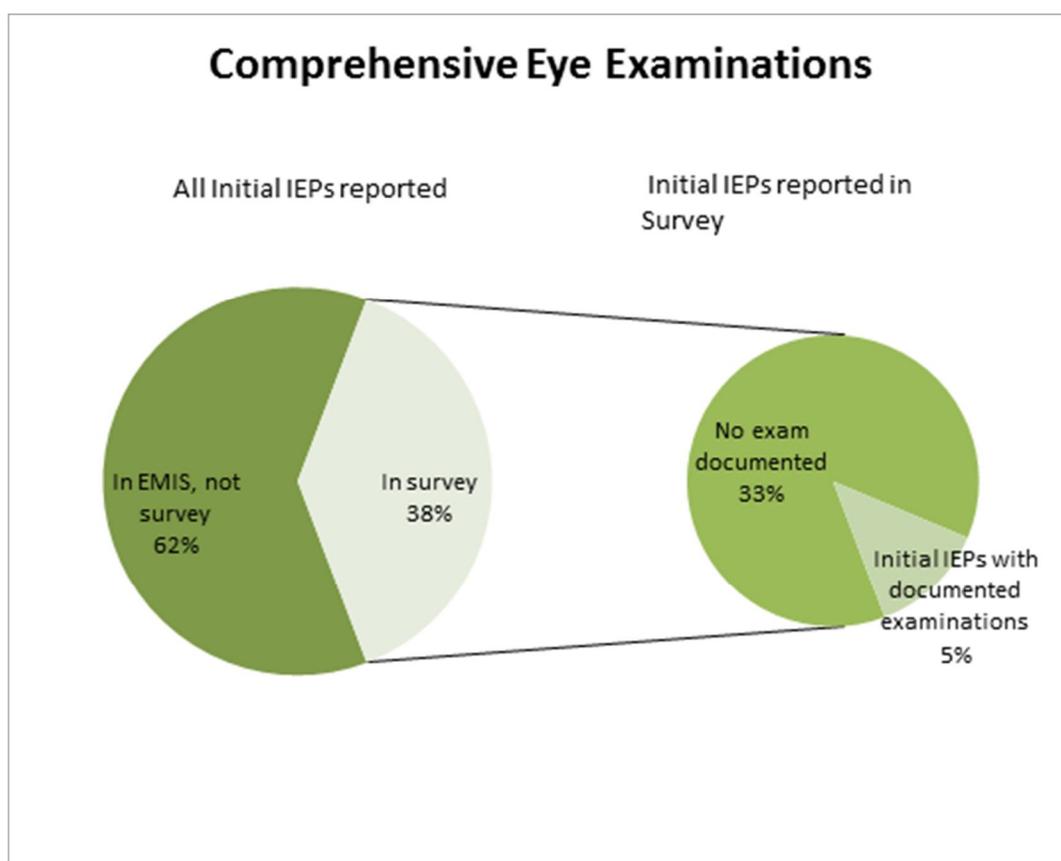
Implementation of Required Comprehensive Eye Examinations

DECEMBER 31, 2013

2012-2013 SCHOOL YEAR

Implementation of Required Comprehensive Eye Examinations 2012-2013 School Year

State law¹ requires a student to have a comprehensive eye examination either prior to or shortly after the start of an initial individualized education program (IEP). Recent state law² added requirements that the Ohio Department of Education collect and report data about the implementation of this law. The department provided districts, including community schools, with a tool to record the exams in the 2012-2013 school year and used an online survey to collect the results. Districts were asked to record the notification of the requirement for the eye exam, the date of the exam and any special circumstances preventing an exam. In future years, the department will collect this data from districts through the Education Management Information System (EMIS).



As of Oct. 15, 2013, 450 districts, including community schools, responded to the survey. This represents slightly fewer than half of the districts and community schools eligible to take the survey. Data from the surveys were based on their reported 13,391 initial IEPs. The department anticipates that incorporating this data collection into EMIS will increase the response rate.

Districts informed parents of the requirement. Although the survey did not include a question concerning how or if parents were informed of the requirement, most

responding districts and community schools (79.2 percent of those who provided additional comments) specifically reported informing parents. Several required parents to sign an acknowledgement of their notification; others commented about sending letters home; many indicated that they had attempted or completed follow-up phone calls. Some districts described efforts to obtain the follow-up statuses of eye exams. For example, in one district, 54 students did not have eye exam records. District staff called the phone numbers on record for each student and found that the phone numbers for 23 students were no longer working. For 31 households, the district staff left messages but received no return phone calls.

Relatively few parents reported a follow-up exam. Roughly 15 percent of the parents of children with initial IEPs reported their children had received follow-up comprehensive eye exams. The status of the follow-up exams was unknown in 57 percent of the cases.

Parents provided few reasons for not following up. Respondents used multiple choice responses to indicate the following possible reasons for lack of exams:

Student withdrew	Student hospitalization	Parent refusal	Conducted, but late	No convenient provider
1.30%	0.17%	24.32%	1.47%	0.61%

Respondents were given an opportunity to provide additional information about this process. One district staff member summarized a general refusal by parents to participate: “Although we provide the eye exam brochure and indicate that it is a requirement, parents simply do not get back with us regarding their follow-up. Several parents have been outright indignant toward our school psychologists and indicated a refusal to let the government dictate something like this to them.”

Responses indicated that district personnel often conducted screenings that produced no indication of potential vision issues. Many parents and school staff believed that when the screening by school personnel showed little likelihood of a problem, additional examination was an expensive redundancy.

Respondents in 25 districts stated explicitly that parents had refused due to financial reasons.

Parents of preschoolers reported that they were told by ophthalmologists that their students were too young for results to be valid, so they chose not to schedule the exam.

Districts provided suggestions for improvement. Results from this year’s survey suggest the need for changes to the comprehensive eye exam process. The existence of a law with no consequences for those who do not follow it does not ensure that needed exams occur. Several respondents called the existing law unenforceable. There is little incentive for parents to obtain comprehensive eye exams and none to report the completion of exams to the district.

One district came up with a creative solution to ensure that vision screenings led to comprehensive eye exams, when appropriate. The response from that district described, "Since we are in a small urban district struggling with poverty and transiency, it is difficult to make contact with all parents to get this kind of specific information. Most often, the intervention specialists report that parents or guardians tell them they "are working on it" and they often view more questions as being invasive. We have involved ophthalmologists in required vision screenings and then we can target students who need comprehensive exams and find a way to assist parents in getting it done. This seems to be a better approach and will hopefully make a difference in the future."

¹ Ohio Revised Code Section 3323.19

² Senate Bill 316