

## DEFECTIVE EYES HANDICAP CHILD

### Conservation Council Finds Amazing Facts

Millions of school children are handicapped in their studies by defective eyes, it is stated in a report embodying the results of a survey by the Eyesight Conservation Council of America of statutory provisions in the United States and Territories for testing the sight of pupils.

"Thousands of children," says the report, "are suffering from eyestrain, and large numbers are forced to discontinue their endeavors to acquire an education because of this same physical defect. It has been conclusively proven that poor eyesight is an important associate cause of backwardness, stupidity, apparent laziness and truancy."

The report estimated that at this time the number of children enrolled in the elementary and secondary schools of the United States exceeds 24,000,000, or more than 20 per cent of the population. More than 60 per cent of this number are said to have substantial eye defects.

"Even simple visual tests," the report continues, "reveal 25 per cent with manifest defects and symptoms of eyestrain. Many are contending with vision so defective that mental development is seriously retarded and comfort, health, and even safety are jeopardized. Fully 6,000,000 of our school children are at a disadvantage in their efforts to gain an education."

Conclusions set forth in the report, applying to the country as a whole, say there is a wide diversity in the provisions and regulations. It was found that statutory provisions for the examination of the eyes of school children have not been adopted generally by State Legislatures, and that only twenty States have statutes providing for eye tests. There are only two other States that have board regulations which take the place of statutes, and in most instances general physical examination laws are not interpreted to include eye tests.

Established statutes are called inadequate. In only thirteen States are the laws mandatory for all school districts. Separate sections dealing exclusively with eye tests are found on the statutes of but six states and in conjunction with tests for hearing in only three others. There is often a delegation of dual responsibility upon Boards of Health and Education or authority not clearly defined. The necessity for keeping records and reporting results to a designated State department is generally overlooked. Suitable provisions are not made for training teachers, school nurses or health inspectors in the methods of making tests.

"The laws are not generally enforced," the report declares. "A systematic effort is being made to enforce the laws in only eight States. There is practically no State supervision in at least thirty-three States and four Territories, and very little in seven others. A conservative estimate based upon analysis of the returns would be that less than one-third of the school children of the entire country are receiving visual tests. The word 'mandatory' has no significance in many instances."

The report is published "as an argument that every State and Territory possession of the United States should recognize the importance of the care of the eyes of its future citizens; that tests for defective vision may be carried out advantageously by teachers in the schools with a negligible expenditure of time, money and effort, and that State Boards of Health and Education should consider it their duty to approve and provide regulations, instructions and the necessary appliances and to so supervise the work that all school children shall receive the attention that is their right."

A program is recommended for State educational departments, local school authorities, educators and teachers. Every State Board of Education is urged to bring about the observance of an eyesight conservation day. A model law is not required, according to the investigators, who state:

"The conclusions indicate that no lay the existence of laws, but the disposition an dproper appreciation of authorities for the need for eye tests that is responsible for the commendable work that is being done in a few States and in certain communities."

The responsibility is said to lie with the State Boards of Education, which "should issue mandatory regulations providing for the conducting of eye tests in every urban and rural school in the State." There is pressing need, it was pointed out, for eye conservation in the rural districts as a part of the general plan to improve country life. The cooperation of State Boards of Health is advocated.

The facts upon which the report is based were obtained from Commissioners of Education and Commissioners of Health of the several States, the District of Columbia, the Panama Canal Zone, the Territories of Alaska, and Hawaii, Porto Rico and the Philippines Islands.



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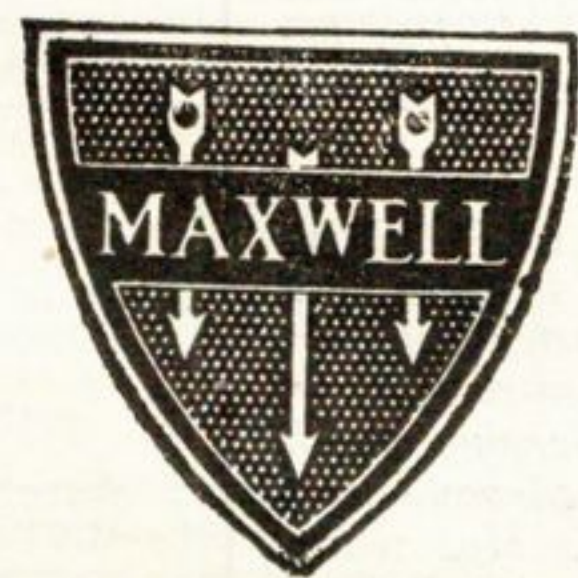
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