



July 23, 2012

Helen Spencer, JD  
1570 Cutler Way  
Zillah, WA 98953

Dear Helen,

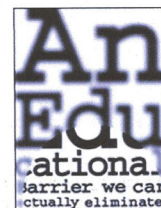
I am writing in strong support of your proposal to Kevin Larson of Microsoft for funding of a multidisciplinary conference on vision and learning. Since Kevin knows my work from the VPI meeting in Forest Grove earlier this summer, I won't repeat much about me or the problem. Suffice it to say that current practices in school and (sadly) often also in doctor's offices do not identify reading-related vision problems. And as you have said -- and our data support this assertion -- foster children, children of color, juvenile offenders, and children living in poverty are more likely to have vision problems than others.

The basic question is this: How can we expect proficient learning by our children when the information available to the brain is corrupt to start with; that is, if the eyes are in conflict with each other instead of working together? And the answer is: We can't. Our task is, therefore, to find ways to (a) identify children at risk and (b) establish cost-effective ways to help them. To that end, I would see the purpose of the Conference to be four-fold:

- To present current evidence that vision problems relate to learning problems
- To evaluate current models for detecting vision problems that can inhibit reading
- To understand and evaluate current mechanisms for alleviating vision-related reading problems
- To consider new models of public policy relating to both detection and intervention

Of course, this outline is just a suggestion. As time goes on, and if the Conference is approved, then more detailed ideas can be developed. Having teachers and school administrators involved is essential. School health administrators also would be interested. I would also recommend that at least one ophthalmologist and perhaps a pediatrician be invited to attend, for it is these professions that are experiencing the most difficulty in understanding how vision problems can affect learning.

I commend you for referencing the Harvard conference in 2001 as a predecessor, for they had a powerful conclusion, printed in the form of an eye chart, that I still remember today:



Eleven years after that conference, and 11 years after Gemstone began its work with California school children, I still believe we can eliminate this problem. But first, people must know about it and society must decide how to handle it. A really important step in that direction would be a conference such as you propose.

Best regards,

Maureen Powers PhD  
Senior Scientist