

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

November 20, 2012

**Contact: Steve Todd, Health Officer
517-279-9561, ext. 148
Theresa Christner, Health Ed./Health Promotion Dir.
517-279-9561, ext. 144**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Laughter, Seeing Smiles!

Coldwater, MI. A good start in the classroom depends on more than just school supplies. Healthy hearing, vision, speech and language are key to success at school. If a child has problems in these areas, the sooner they're spotted, the better they can be treated.

Hearing loss or impairments make it difficult for children to learn. After all, much of early learning is based on listening to others. As a result, these children experience language delays or may look like they are disobedient or suffer from attention deficit when in reality they didn't hear the directions or didn't understand them.

Vision problems can also cause trouble in learning, and can easily go unnoticed. About 1 in 10 preschoolers has a vision problem, but kids don't always tell others about their symptoms. A child who has always had a vision problem might think it's normal for objects to be blurred. In addition, poor eyesight can cause headaches and hinder reading and interfere with a child's ability to stay on task.

To assist parents in uncovering possible hearing and vision problems, the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency offers free hearing and vision screenings to children who live in the tri-county. Hearing screenings are scheduled annually for area preschoolers and kindergarten students at either school sites or kindergarten roundup events and then for all 2nd and 4th graders through local schools. Vision screenings are scheduled annually for all preschool students and for students in the 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th and 9th grades. Parents are notified if issues are identified and a referral is needed. Last year, the program conducted 3,907 preschool screens and 15,298 school-age screens.

Vision and hearing technicians employed by the health department complete a four-week educational training with practicum and are evaluated regularly to assure compliance with State of Michigan policies and protocols. According to Steve Todd, Health Officer, "Our technicians are well-trained and work hard to maintain their certification. They not only perform the initial screenings but also follow up with the students, parents and schools to make sure any identified problems are addressed. After all, the purpose of early detection is to get early treatment, which should lead to better health and educational outcomes for the student."

To learn more about this free program or other important services provided by the health department, call the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency:

Branch County Office: 517-279-9561

Hillsdale County Office: 517-437-7395

St. Joseph County Office: 269-273-2961

Or visit our website at www.bhsj.org.

#