



## News release

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Contact: Denise Dick, district spokeswoman, 330-744-6930; Roxann Sebest, United Way of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley, director of marketing and communications, 330-746-9494 or [rsebest@ymvunitedway.org](mailto:rsebest@ymvunitedway.org)

### They can see clearly now

YOUNGSTOWN – A cooperative effort that delivered eye glasses to students who needed them also yielded higher attendance, a lower discipline rate and better test performance among those students compared to the average pupil.

The collaboration included the Youngstown City School District, the United Way of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley, the Essilor Vision Foundation, the Sight for All United Foundation, Classic Optical, Ageless Eyecare, the Youngstown City Health Department, Youngstown Lions Club, DentaQuest, Modern Optical International and the Mercy Health Foundation.

Last fall, more than 2,000 YCSD elementary students underwent vision screenings by volunteers from Vallourec, Youngstown State University and others who got involved through the partnership. Children who failed vision screenings were given the opportunity to have a full eye examination at their school. Ageless Eye Care of Chicago transported mobile equipment to each school. Seven optometrists from Sight for All United and Doctors for Sight, along with representatives from Ageless Eye Care, administered full eye exams for 281 students right in the school. Every child who was examined and who needed glasses -- 180 of them --

selected frames and received two pairs of glasses: one for home and one for school. The students were in kindergarten through fifth and seventh-grade. Eighty-five students at Youngstown Community School and YCSD's Taft Elementary also benefitted from the program earlier in the calendar year.

A data analysis shows those YCSD students who were given glasses through the collaboration logged an attendance rate higher than the average student, 92.6 percent compared to 90.2 percent. Their discipline rate was also 41 percent lower than the average student.

More students who were given eyeglasses also met the Third-Grade Reading Guarantee, 65 percent compared to 57 percent for average students.

Those given eyeglasses also scored 17 percent higher on the AIR English Language Arts test and 6 percent higher on the AIR math test. On the NWEA reading test, students prescribed glasses through the vision program performed 13 percent better than the student average and they 25 percent better than the student average on the NWEA math test.

"I think it's pretty clear that students perform better in school when they have the glasses they need," said CEO Krish Mohip. "We're fortunate in this community to have so many groups, agencies and organizations that are willing to help our children. It really does make a difference."

Through its Success After 6, United Way began working with the various vision organizations.

"United Way realizes change does not happen alone, and we must be united to make true impact," said Bob Hannon, president of United Way of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley. "This collaboration is proof of what working together can do for our families and the children. Basic medical care can be a burden on our families, and our job as United Way is to break down those barriers to a student's success in the classroom. We want to thank all the partners who worked hard to make this happen."

Sight for All United is a new non-profit organization established in fall 2016 with a mission to help all people in the tri-county area reach their best visual potential. Recognizing the disconnect in the Valley between medical services and insurance coverage, Sight for All United Has organized 43 optometrists and ophthalmologists in the tri-county area to help improve access to vision services.

“We created Sight for All United here in our Valley to help the community achieve its best vision,” said Dr. S.A. Erzurum, co-founder and president of Sight for All United and co-founder of Doctors for Sight. “We saw a true need in Youngstown when we were approached in February 2016 with 95 children that failed eye screenings but had never received an eye exam. That pilot program demonstrated the significant vision difficulties the students were struggling with and that glasses could help eliminate a simple but significant problem in their academic success. We are so proud to collaborate on this school vision outreach. Each organization was essential in the outcome of this project. ”

Dr. Erzurum is also professor of surgery at Northeast Ohio Medical University.

Ennis Britton, a law firm with offices in Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati, provided the legal expertise to facilitate all of the entities working together.

Essilor Vision Foundation is a public non-profit organization committed to eliminating poor vision and its life-long consequences. By providing vision services to underprivileged communities, the organization believes that people have the opportunity to live a better life through better sight.

“It’s estimated that one in four children has a vision problem that affects their ability to learn, but for many kids, blurry vision is normal,” said Kim Schuy, president of Essilor Vision Foundation. “Children rely on their parents, teachers and communities to be advocates for their vision care. That’s why we are proud to provide lenses and lab services to community initiatives like the Youngstown City School program that serve kids in need. Together, we can help children see clearly and truly soar in life.”

Classic Optical, a company that manufactures eyeglasses in the Valley, brought its long-time partner, the Essilor Vision Foundation, to the endeavor.

"Recognizing that vision deficiencies are a significant barrier to learning, many organizations are searching for partners to provide quality eyeglasses to their students in need." Dawn Friedkin, Classic Optical president, said. "By partnering with Essilor Vision Foundation and other institutions across the country, Classic Optical helps provide students with the most precious gift – vision. Youngstown has given us so much and we are honored to be able to bring our mission of 'improving lives by improving sight' home to our local community."

Stacia Erdos, vice president of strategic planning at United Way, said the program shows the significance of agencies working together.

"United Way is about bringing together partners to remove the barriers to learning," she said. "Through our Success After 6 program, it was immediately apparent that vision was a significant problem hindering our children's learning success. This collaboration is a testament to what public, private and nonprofit entities can accomplish when they work together to tackle a significant issue. What some may see as a simple remedy – providing eyeglasses – is already having a major impact on our students."

Planning is already underway to provide the program again this fall to reach more children in need of eyeglasses. Anyone who wants to volunteer may contact Roxann Sebest at the United Way at 330-746-8494.

The vision initiative aligns with Goal II of CEO Mohip's strategic plan for YCSD, Supporting the Whole Child.

