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Howard County Free Eye-Clinic Served More Than 150 Children Last Weekend *Outreach effort helps 117 HCPSS students see clearer with FREE glasses*

Making A Difference

As a recipient of one of the American Optometric Association (AOA) Optometry Cares Foundation 2019 Healthy Eyes Healthy Children (HEHC) grants, the Maryland Optometric Association (MOA), with support from our Beyond 20/20 partner, VSP Eyes of Hope program, was able to provide free comprehensive eye exams and glasses (when prescribed) to over 150 Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) children who failed their school vision screening or were referred by school staff or a reading specialist last weekend. More than 75% of the students served during the Beyond 20/20 outreach event required prescription glasses, and most received a second pair at no cost donated by HEHC partner, the Essilor Vision Foundation. MOA wishes to thank all Beyond 20/20 program collaborators including HCPSS, the Howard County Health Department, the Lions Club, VSP Eyes of Hope, the AOA Optometry Cares Foundation, Essilor Vision Foundation, RightEye and the 100+ County volunteers that made the event a tremendous success.

Ellicott City, MD (Feb 29-Mar 1)

The Beyond 20/20 outreach event shed light on an important public health crisis: children in Maryland and throughout the United States are not receiving necessary eye care. According to a VSP survey, 76% of parents believe that sight is the most important sense, yet only 50% take their children for back-to-school eye exams. Many parents reported skipping eye exams because their child already had a screening at school. Unfortunately, school vision screenings only test a small fraction of vision health and may give parents a false sense of security. In fact, vision screenings fail to detect 75% of children with vision problems. On average, 60% of children who fail screenings do not receive appropriate follow up care with an eye doctor.

Students without access to eye care through conventional means turned out in full force to take advantage of services offered at the Beyond 20/20 free eye care clinic last weekend. Children of all ages from more than 40 different Howard County schools attended the event, but the sentiment of grateful students, parents/guardians and teachers was one in the same – thank you for helping us see more clearly! Beyond 20/20 patient, Darryl White (a 1st grader at Ducketts Lane Elementary School – pictured on the right) was chaperoned by his sister, Ms. Tamira Harris and his school principal, Ms. Heidi Batter. When asked about the event, Principal Batter smiled and said, “Darryl is finally going to be able to see the board!” Older students echoed the similar feelings. “The glasses are going to help me see better in class. It’s really important now that I’m in the 8th grade” said Abraham Ikoghode.



Beyond 20/20 also caught the attention of federal, State and local representatives who came to the event to better understand the purpose of its outreach efforts and to meet the children whose lives will be forever altered by the services they received. Among these policymakers were all members of the District 12 Delegation (serving Baltimore and Howard County), State Senator Clarence Lam and State Delegates Terri Hill, Eric Ebersole and Jessica Feldmark. Del. Hill has introduced legislation before the Maryland General Assembly this Session (House Bill 1375) to improve

detection and management of childhood vision problems in the early school years. After a comprehensive tour of the Beyond 20/20 operation speaking with several student patients, Delegate Hill commented, “when we know better, we do better. Now that we know how many kids we’ve been missing and how we have failed them, we need to fix this. This ought to be an easy lift because we have identified the problem and we know that failure to address this [lack of follow up vision care] has long term repercussions, not only for the kids, but also for our communities. We can, and are obligated to, do better.” The MOA agrees!

Parents may be surprised to learn that all children should be receiving routine comprehensive eye care before and during school years. 60 percent of students identified as problem learners, including children diagnosed with learning disabilities or dyslexia, have an undiagnosed vision disorder. In fact, 25 percent of school-aged children have a vision problem that can interfere with learning, behavior, and self-esteem. Yet many of these conditions remain undetected due to misconceptions about the reliability of vision screenings or the value of comprehensive eye examinations. While the Beyond 20/20 free eye clinic was successful in bringing needed vision care to many underserved students in Howard County, the Maryland Optometric Association encourages all Maryland parents to seek routine eye care for their school-aged children. Eye health is more than 20/20 vision, and eye examinations also reveal information about general health and development. The schedule for childhood eye exams below is recommended by the American Optometric Association.

- A comprehensive baseline eye exam between the ages of 6 months and 12 months.
- At least one comprehensive eye exam between the ages of 3 and 5 to detect imbalances in vision development that could have long-term effects.
- An annual, comprehensive eye exam starting before first grade and annually thereafter.

As part of the #HealthyMarylandEyes2020 public health campaign, Maryland Optometric Association encourages parents to make 2020 the year to prioritize a comprehensive eye exam for all family members. To find an optometrist in your area, or for additional information on children's vision and the importance of back-to-school eye exams, please visit AOA.org.

It is the mission of the MOA to promote the highest quality vision and eye care to the citizens and diverse communities of the state of Maryland; to support and advance the profession of optometry through advocacy, professional development and public awareness; to serve as a resource for our patients and members; and to provide public health services as an integral part of the health care system.

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