



## **Vision To Learn Kicks Off in Des Moines to Improve Student Learning**

Pilot program will provide free glasses to 160 students at five Des Moines schools this spring

**Des Moines, IA** (May 15, 2017) – A community kick-off event at Lovejoy Elementary this morning celebrated the launch of Vision To Learn in Des Moines and provided 20 students with free glasses to help them succeed in school and life. Approximately 160 students at five Des Moines elementary schools will receive glasses this spring as part of a pilot project that brings a successful national model to central Iowa, and as part of Vision To Learn’s plan to serve kids throughout the state.

“Providing kids with glasses changes their lives forever. They become more confident, participate more in the classroom, and do better in reading, math and all of their school work,” said Austin Beutner, founder and chairman of Vision To Learn.

United Way of Central Iowa helped bring the pilot project to Des Moines and the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines provided funding. The Vision To Learn Iowa mobile clinic traveled to central Iowa schools to give vision exams and glasses to students. Prevent Blindness Iowa provided free vision screenings in advance of the eye exams.

"Thanks to this partnership with Vision To Learn, United Way, Prevent Blindness Iowa, and the Community Foundation we are able to provide one more vital tool that supports our students, enhances their education, and puts them on a clearer path to graduate and succeed," said Thomas Ahart, superintendent of Des Moines Public Schools.

This spring, around 2,000 students at Lovejoy, Capitol View, King, Moulton, and Monroe elementary schools received vision screenings by a school nurse or trained staff and volunteers with Prevent Blindness Iowa. Students who did not pass an initial screening were referred to the Vision To Learn mobile vision clinic to receive a modified vision exam by a licensed optometrist. Children prescribed glasses chose a style and frame from a wide selection offered by the mobile clinic. The glasses are now being dispensed to each child, free of charge.

During the pilot, more than 200 children received exams from the mobile vision clinic and of those, approximately 160 will receive two pairs of glasses—one to keep at school and one to keep at home—which will be delivered to the kids at school.

“This innovative program is another way we are mobilizing our community under Read to Succeed to help all children read proficiently by the end of third grade,” said Elisabeth Buck, president of United Way of Central Iowa. “This program especially gives students a vital tool they need to learn, and ultimately, to graduate from high school.”

“The Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines is proud to support Vision To Learn and our youngest neighbors,” said Kristi Knous, president of the Community Foundation of Greater



Des Moines. “We understand the critical role success in the classroom has on the lives of these students today and for the rest of their lives. We look forward to these students becoming our community’s next generation of leaders.”

“Prevent Blindness Iowa is pleased to be part of this program,” said Jeanne Burmeister, executive director of Prevent Blindness Iowa. “Keeping children’s eyes healthy has been part of our mission since 1958. Early treatment of vision problems in young children will support a child’s overall development, early literacy skills, and ultimately, school performance.”

United Way is working with Vision To Learn to secure funding and expand the program over the next two years, targeting schools in central Iowa with more than 50 percent of students receiving free and reduced lunch. Vision to Learn, which started in Dubuque in January 2017, plans to continue to expand to serve more kids throughout the state.

### **About United Way**

United Way of Central Iowa fights for the health, education, and financial stability of all central Iowans. For over 100 years United Way of Central Iowa has brought together nonprofits, businesses, government, community leaders, volunteers, and more to identify and tackle central Iowa’s toughest challenges. Focusing on issues such as early grade reading, poverty, mental and social health, high school graduation, and career training, United Way of Central Iowa inspires central Iowans to give, advocate, and volunteer to improve lives and empower all in our community. For more information about United Way of Central Iowa, visit [www.unitedwaydm.org](http://www.unitedwaydm.org).

### **About Vision To Learn**

Vision To Learn began operations with one van in Los Angeles in 2012, and now serves kids in low-income communities in over 180 cities from Baltimore to Honolulu. Vision To Learn serves the needs of the hardest-to-reach kids in low-income communities; more than 89 percent of kids served by Vision To Learn live in poverty, and 87 percent are kids of color. Since its inception, Vision To Learn has helped screen more than 430,000 students, provided almost 85,000 with eye exams, and provided 65,000 with glasses – all free of charge. For more information, please visit [visiontolearn.org](http://visiontolearn.org), e-mail [Iowa@visiontolearn.org](mailto:Iowa@visiontolearn.org) or call (563) 213-8698.

### **About the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines**

The Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines improves quality of life for all by promoting charitable giving, connecting donors with causes they care about, and providing leadership on important community issues...we’re simply better together. The Community Foundation manages assets in excess of \$450 million, administers over 1,650 charitable funds and distributed over \$29 million in grants in 2016.

### **About Prevent Blindness Iowa**

Prevent Blindness Iowa is Iowa’s leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. Focused on promoting a continuum of vision care, Prevent



Blindness Iowa touches the lives of thousands of people each year through public and professional education, advocacy, certified vision screening and training, community and patient service programs and research. For more information on eye health and safety, call Prevent Blindness Iowa at 515-244-4341/800-329-8782 or visit [www.preventblindness.org/iowa](http://www.preventblindness.org/iowa).

The following representatives are available for interviews at the 10 a.m. press event:

- Dr. Thomas Ahart, Superintendent, Des Moines Public Schools
- Elisabeth Buck, President, United Way of Central Iowa
- Kristi Knous, President, Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines
- Damian Carroll, External Relations Director, Vision To Learn
- Jeanne Burmeister, Executive Director, Prevent Blindness Iowa
- Students who are receiving glasses for the first time

Media will also have the opportunity to tour the Vision To Learn mobile clinic.

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