



OHIO
OPTOMETRIC
ASSOCIATION

House Bill 110
Interested Party Testimony
Dr. Shane Foster
President-Elect, Ohio Optometric Association
May 13, 2021

Chairman Dolan, members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning on House Bill 110, the proposed state operating budget for fiscal years 2022-23. My name is Dr. Shane Foster and I am an optometrist from Southeastern Ohio. I own and operate Athens Eye Care, which has locations in Athens and Logan. I am the President-Elect of the Ohio Optometric Association (OOA), which represents 70% of the state's Doctors of Optometry, and I serve as the President of the OOA's charitable arm, the Ohio Optometric Foundation. I am here today to ask for your support of a unique mobile vision care program that will benefit children and families in the Appalachian region of Ohio by improving access to eye exams and glasses for students.

The OOA and our Foundation, have partnered with the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio (FAO) and school-based mobile vision care experts, Vision To Learn (VTL), to develop a mobile vision clinic program, called iSee with Vision To Learn, which will serve the 32 county Appalachian region of our state. The program seeks to help meet the needs for improved access to vision care services in the region and will deliver more than 2,500 eye exams and over 2,000 new prescription glasses annually. Additionally, the program will help families develop relationships with local vision care professionals to ensure a continuity of care for students.

The need for improved access to vision care services for Ohio children is significant, especially in our Appalachian areas. In 2016, the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio surveyed school nurses throughout the region and found "the greatest challenge [to students getting the glasses they need] is getting families to follow-up on referrals for a vision exam." Additionally, a recent Ohio Department of Health report detailed that over 77% of students who are identified as having potential vision problems through a vision screening, do not receive the recommended eye exam from a vision care professional. This is unacceptable. Our partnership is aimed at addressing this major problem and helping build a bridge to a lifetime of comprehensive eye care for students, which has potential benefits in education, overall health and other areas of life.

We are asking for your help by supporting an amendment to HB 110 that would make an appropriation to the Pay for Success Fund within the State Treasurer's ResultsOhio program. The iSee with Vision To Learn project was recently deemed by the State Treasurer as a "Pay for Success Ready" program. For your review, I have attached additional details on the iSee with Vision To Learn program, the Treasurer's ResultsOhio Feasibility Study outline on the project and drafted amendment language.

On behalf of the OOA, thank you for considering our request and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

iSee With Vision To Learn



OVERVIEW

The Foundation for Appalachian Ohio (FAO) is partnering with Vision To Learn (VTL) and the Ohio Optometric Foundation (OOF) to launch a mobile vision clinic. This partnership will focus on providing mobile eye exams and glasses to children in K-12th grade. The clinic will travel directly to schools and summer program sites, providing direct access to critical vision care services. Every year, it will help more than 2,500 children who need glasses but do not have them across the 32 Appalachian Ohio counties.

THE NEED

FAO surveyed school nurses through the region in 2016. The survey found “the greatest challenge [to students getting the glasses they need] is getting families to follow-up on referrals for a vision exam.” Supporting this, the Ohio Department of Health’s Vision Program Annual Report 2018-2019, found 77% of children who fail a vision screening in school and are referred for an eye exam did *not* receive the recommended eye exam from an optometrist or ophthalmologist.

It is estimated that 35,000 children in Appalachian Ohio need, but do not have, glasses.

"Ohio has a third-grade reading guarantee but not a third-grade vision guarantee. We expect them to read at a certain level, but we're not giving them the tools to do that."

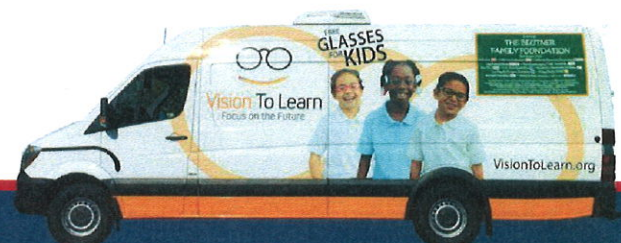
-Dr. Shane Foster, Ohio Optometric Association

HOW IT WORKS

To eliminate access barriers by directly providing vision services to students at Title I schools in Appalachian Ohio, FAO, VTL, and OOF will partner to launch a mobile vision clinic. The clinic, staffed by an Ohio-licensed optometrist and optician, will travel to the highest need communities across the region, based on low levels of vision services utilization, as drawn from Ohio Department of Medicaid databases.

The state-funded portion of the project will deliver more than 2,500 eye exams and 2,000 new prescription glasses annually – at a cost of only \$150 per exam and glasses for children who do not pass an initial vision screening. Students will receive an exam and glasses as prescribed, free of charge, and will then be connected to a local vision care provider, establishing a bridge to a lifetime of vision care for the students.

The project team will work directly with school districts to finalize Memoranda of Understandings. The program will then partner with school nurses, teachers, and administrators, to ensure delivery of high-quality vision screenings, exams, and the dispensing of glasses, all of which will be provided on site at schools.



iSee With Vision To Learn

POTENTIAL IMPACT

There is a strong correlation between clear vision and a child's ability to learn, as 80% of a child's learning is visual. iSee with Vision To Learn will collaborate with the Ohio Treasurer's office through ResultsOHIO to develop an evaluation plan of the program.

The project partners will measure the improved current access to eye exams and glasses and will work with the Ohio Optometric Association to evaluate improved access to future optometric care. Students receiving VTL glasses have been studied by major research universities, including Johns Hopkins Wilmer Eye Institute and the UCLA Mattel Children's Hospital, and demonstrate significant academic outcomes, as measured by GPA and standardized test score improvement. Such improved student performance, in addition to improved behavior, attentiveness, and healthcare benefits such as headache relief, are anticipated and could be further validated and assessed by school nurses and educators. Access to optometric care will be confirmed through information obtained from local optometrists who conduct follow-up visits with students.

Numbers of students receiving examinations and glasses will be tracked using Vision To Learn's HIPAA-compliant, secure electronic medical records database.

PROGRAM COST

iSee with Vision To Learn is a \$1.13 million three-year pilot. Several entities, including the Ohio Optometric Foundation, Deerbrook Charitable Trust, and individuals contributing through FAO, have committed to fund upfront costs of this project.

State funding, if achieved, will provide the opportunity to transform the program into a successful and sustained public-private partnership, helping thousands more students in Appalachian Ohio.

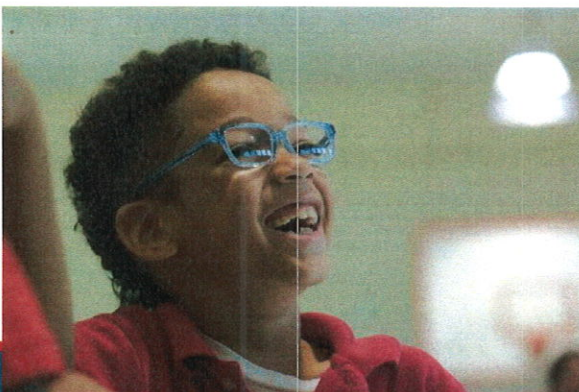
PROJECT PARTNERS

FAO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit regional community foundation with a mission to create opportunities for Appalachian Ohio's citizens and communities by inspiring and supporting philanthropy across the region's 32 counties. FAO partners with over 530 funds, and to date, has invested more than \$21,107,952 back into the region through grants, scholarships and signature initiatives.

VTL is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that has provided mobile vision services to low-income communities since 2012. In less than a decade, the organization has provided 290,000 students with eye exams and 230,000 with new prescription glasses across 13 states, and has 26 active mobile clinics.

OOF is the 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable arm of the Ohio Optometric Association (OOA). OOF is committed to improving the vision and eye health of children and other Ohioans in visual need by providing access to necessary eye care. For over a decade, OOF has operated the In-School Eye Exam (iSee) program in areas of need throughout Ohio, with volunteer optometrist members of the OOA. To date, the iSee program has provided 1,581 exams and has prescribed 1,353 pairs of prescription glasses.

iSee with Vision To Learn is a unique and effective partnership because it combines the philanthropic base of the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio with the operational ability to provide thousands of children with exams and glasses through Vision To Learn and the bridge to a lifetime of vision care from the Ohio Optometric Foundation.



ResultsOHIO

ResultsOHIO FEASIBILITY REPORT

As part of the ResultsOHIO program, prospective Pay for Success (“PFS”) projects are subject to a uniform application and screening process. ResultsOHIO Feasibility Reports are only issued to those projects deemed PFS Appropriate and Ready, meaning that the project, as described in the application, meets the requirements for the ResultsOHIO model and is well positioned to move forward with a PFS contract should it receive the support of policymakers.

Foundation for Appalachian Ohio ICAN See Project

PFS APPROPRIATE AND READY

The project, as described in the application, meets the requirements for the ResultsOHIO model because it has garnered support from the Governor’s Office of Appalachia and the Ohio Optometric Association, demonstrates a strong history of service delivery and possesses a clear theory of change to increase utilization of vision exams, lends itself to measurable performance metrics, and has secured commitments for upfront funding.

PROJECT PROPOSAL OVERVIEW

The Foundation for Appalachian Ohio (FAO) plans to partner with Vision To Learn (VTL) and the Ohio Optometric Foundation (OOF) to launch a mobile vision clinic. This clinic will travel to schools with the intent of eliminating barriers to accessing and receiving vision services and helping thousands of children across Appalachian Ohio’s 32 counties.



PROJECT DURATION/COSTS

3 years, \$1,130,000¹



POPULATION

K-12 Students in Appalachian Ohio attending Title I Schools



LOCATION

Title I Schools in Appalachian Ohio



SERVICE PROVIDER

Vision To Learn



SERVICE INTERMEDIARY

Foundation for Appalachian Ohio



PERFORMANCE METRICS

Improved access to future optometric care; and Improved student performance



POTENTIAL PRIVATE SECTOR FUNDERS

Several entities, including the Ohio Optometric Foundation, Deerbrook Charitable Trust, and individuals contributing through FAO, have committed to fund the upfront costs of this project.



INDEPENDENT EVALUATOR

To be procured by the Treasurer’s office, pursuant to ORC 113.61, upon receipt of a project appropriation.

¹ This figure was provided by the applicant and may not reflect all other costs necessary to administer the PFS contract, including those related to the independent evaluator. The appropriation will need to account for total cost for the project. Please contact the Treasurer’s office for more information.

FOUNDATION FOR APPALACHIAN OHIO ICAN SEE PROJECT PROPOSAL**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

With a goal of eliminating access barriers by directly providing vision services to students at Title I schools in Appalachian Ohio, FAO, VTL, and OOF will partner to launch a mobile vision clinic. The clinic plans to travel to the highest need areas across the region based on low levels of vision services utilization, as identified from Ohio Department of Medicaid databases. Students receiving an exam and possible vision correction will then be connected with a local vision care provider for continued care.

ANTICIPATED PROJECT COSTS AND TIMELINE

After a four month ramp up, VTL is anticipated to deliver services for three years. Over the project's duration, it is estimated that 7,500 students will receive eye exams and 6,000 may receive eyeglasses.

It has been suggested that results-based payments for successfully meeting performance metrics would total \$1.13 million, which is primarily based off estimated expenses for service delivery and the cost of carrying the upfront capital. The figure is subject to change, as it may not reflect all other costs needed to be included in the appropriation.

ESTABLISHED PROJECT STRUCTURE AND MEMBER DESCRIPTIONS

FAO is a nonprofit regional community foundation with a mission to create opportunities for Appalachian Ohio's citizens and communities by inspiring and supporting philanthropy. To date, FAO has partnered with over 530 funds to invest more than \$21 million back into the region.

VTL is a nonprofit that has provided mobile vision services to low-income communities since 2012. It has provided 289,000 students with eye exams across 13 states and has 26 active mobile clinics.

In addition to providing upfront funding OOF, the charitable arm of the Ohio Optometric Association, assists in securing professionals to staff the clinic and connect students with local vision providers to ensure a continuum of care.

Several entities, including the OOF and Deerbrook Charitable Trust, have provided commitments to fund upfront project costs. Funds cover both the ramp up and first two years of the project, with the third year partially funded. While it is anticipated that upfront funding for the third year will be secured, the organizations have provided contingency plans that ensure project costs are covered regardless.

DATA IDENTIFICATION AND EVALUATION CONSIDERATIONS

Performance metrics may include:

- » Improved access to future optometric care; and
- » Improved student performance (including academic progress, improved behavior, attentiveness, and headache relief).

Students receiving examinations and glasses will be tracked using VTL's HIPAA-compliant, secure electronic medical records database. Improved student performance could be measured through teacher surveys, while access to optometric care could be confirmed through information obtained from local optometrists who conduct follow-up visits with students.

**Any data, figures, calculations, or any other representations used herein were provided by the applicant and have not yet been independently verified by the Treasurer's office. As such, the Treasurer's office offers no warranty, express or implied, regarding the accuracy, adequacy, completeness, legality, reliability, or usefulness of any information provided by the applicant for the purpose of this initial evaluation.*

**If the applicant is awarded a pay for success contract, the project, as proposed in the application, is subject to change, and shall be subject to the terms and conditions of the pay for success contract.*

The Columbus Dispatch

Improving eye, vision care in Appalachian Ohio in focus for optometrists, nonprofit groups

Céilí Doyle

The Columbus Dispatch

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Dr. Shane Foster remembers growing up in Athens County and wearing glasses from an early age. The southeastern Ohio optometrist understands the unique challenges of being a kid in Appalachia and the gaping need for vision care.

And as president of the [Ohio Optometric Foundation](#), a statewide vision advocacy organization, he's seen how that need limits educational success throughout the region.

"Ohio has a third-grade reading guarantee but not a third-grade vision guarantee," Foster said. "We expect them to read at a certain level, but we're not giving them the tools to do that."

But thanks to the Ohio Optometric Foundation's partnership with the [Foundation for Appalachian Ohio](#), the region's philanthropic arm, and [Vision To Learn](#), a national nonprofit group that provides eye

care to students across the country, 7,500 kids across 20 school districts in Appalachian Ohio will receive an eye exam via mobile clinic over the next three years.

Finding a champion in the treasurer's office

On March 1, Ohio Treasurer Robert Sprague announced the vision care project proposal met the criteria under the state's ResultsOHIO program, a program in Sprague's office that assesses whether prospective "pay for success" initiatives are worth additional state dollars.

"We cannot overinvest in our smaller communities in Appalachian Ohio and around the state," the treasurer said.

Sprague explained that ResultsOHIO is a financial model that encourages Ohio's brightest minds in the private sector to help solve problems in the public sector.

Program applicants are required to front the initial costs and, if deemed performance-ready, the treasurer's office releases a data-driven feasibility report measuring the anticipated price, projected timeline and infrastructure to help lawmakers determine if a public reimbursement of funds is worthwhile.

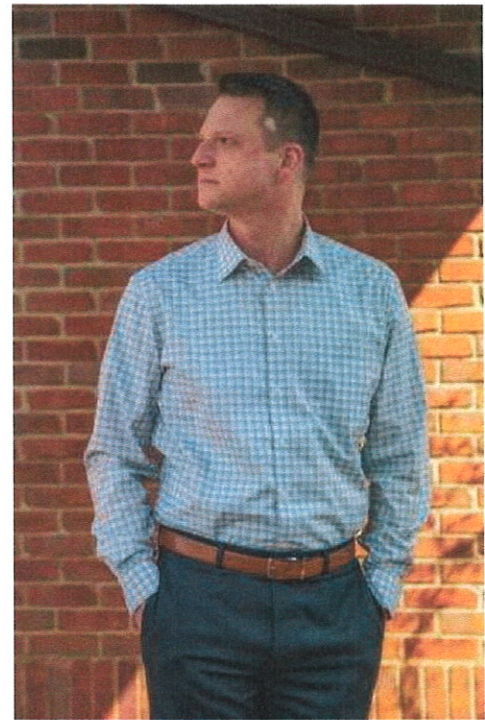
The mobile vision clinic is just one of seven proposals the treasurer's office said qualifies for financial consideration by the state. But Sprague emphasized that ResultsOHIO's goal is not to waste taxpayer dollars.

"Having that private investment on the front-end is a really important," he said. "It's another level of vetting."

His office is very optimistic that the foundation's collaboration with Vision To Learn and the Ohio Optometric Foundation will garner Statehouse support, he added.

'Web of community-based partnerships'

More than 33,000 children in Ohio — pre-K through 12th grade — who fail their in-



school vision screenings and are referred for a comprehensive eye exam don't receive one, according to a 2018-2019 report from the Ohio Department of Health.

The foundation, which operates as a convener of philanthropies, hopes to cut down those numbers considerably with the pilot mobile vision care program, which will begin in the fall.

"One of the things that makes this work is this web of community-based partnerships," foundation CEO Cara Brook said.

After funding a local chapter of the Lion's Club in Harrison County so the organization could purchase eyecare equipment to test students' vision in eastern Ohio, Brook explained, the foundation discovered that other communities had the same challenges and began exploring ways to expand its reach.

Enter Vision To Learn.

"FAO reached out and we got to know them a bit," said Vision To Learn's executive director, Joan Chu Reese. "We quickly realized we were much more effective and complete as a group because we could combine the philanthropic base of the foundation with the operational ability to provide thousands of children with exams and glasses through Vision To Learn and the bridge to a lifetime of vision care from the Ohio Optometric Foundation."



The Ohio Optometric Foundation has experience leading a similar initiative to Vision To Learn through its I-See program, which provides free eye exams and glasses to children. But, as Foster explained, it was a small-scale operation that could only serve 200-250 kids a year.

"The Foundation for Appalachian Ohio said, 'Let's put both groups together in this synergistic relationship,'" the optometrist said.

From there, FAO was able to spearhead fundraising efforts — with contributions from both its partners — for the project, which will cost slightly more than \$1 million over the next three years.

"We're just so grateful for ResultsOHIO seal of approval," Brook said.

The services to children are free but will be billable, in part, to Medicaid, she said. And if the foundation is able to secure funding from the legislature they hope to expand the program by adding additional mobile units.

Chu Reese said Vision To Learn is in the process of recruiting right now and will hire a local program manager who will live in Appalachian Ohio. It will employ locally licensed professionals to conduct eye exams and prescribe glasses.

"The state of Ohio has tried to address these disparities in health care access for a long time," she said, "and with the ResultsOHIO piece it's really a needed service particularly for Appalachian Ohio."



CORRECTION: An earlier version of this article incorrectly referred to Dr. Shane Foster as an ophthalmologist. He is an optometrist — we regret the error.

Céilí Doyle is a Report for America corps member and covers rural issues in Ohio for The Dispatch. Your donation to match our RFA grant helps keep her writing stories like this one. Please consider making a tax-deductible donation at <https://bit.ly/3fNsGaZ>.

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