TuSalud

Free Glasses Can Help Some Poor Kids Perform Better in School

School-based vision programs that provide underserved youngsters with free exams and eyeglasses now shown to up students' ability to learn.

October 4, 2021 By Jeanette L. Pinnace

Poor kids who need glasses and don't have them find it difficult to learn in school. But study findings published in JAMA Ophthalmology show that a school-based intervention in Baltimore that provided such children with free eye exams and free glasses helped improve their learning, reports a press release from the Johns Hopkins University (JHU) online news network Hub.JHU.edu.

For the study, researchers from Johns Hopkins reviewed data from the Vision for Baltimore program, an intervention that provided nearly 15,000 pre-K through 8th grade public school students with glasses. (Many were unaware their vision needed correcting, and some couldn't afford eyeglasses.)

Partners for the project included JHU's Schools of Education and Medicine, Baltimore City Public Schools, the Baltimore City Health Department, the eyewear retailer Warby Parker and the nonprofit Vision To Learn. (The children got their eyes screened and tested and received eyeglasses courtesy of the intervention.)

From 2016 to 2019, scientists checked the scores on standardized reading and math exams taken by 2,304 students in grades 3 to 7 who received glasses via Vision for Baltimore. Researchers noted measurements at both the one- and two-year marks.

Results showed that reading scores went up after one year for children who received glasses compared with those who got a pair later. The math scores of kids in elementary grades also improved significantly. What's more, researchers saw great improvements among girls, children in special ed and the lowest-performing students.

"We rigorously demonstrated that giving kids the glasses they need helps them succeed in school," said Megan Collins, MD, MPH, a pediatric ophthalmologist and a senior author on the study. "The success of the Vision for Baltimore program model and research findings could advance health and educational equity for students across the country."

Amanda J.Neitzel, PhD, the deputy director of evidence research at the Johns Hopkins Center for

Research and Reform in Education explained that kids who received glasses gained the equivalent of two to four more months of additional learning compared with those who didn't get glasses. The lowest-performing children and those in special education classes gained the equivalent of an extra four to six months of educational instruction.

"This is how you close gaps," Neitzel stressed.

However, findings also showed that kids' academic performance faltered after two years. This might occur because over time, schoolkids might wear their glasses less often or lose them or they may need a new prescription.

For students to maintain these learning improvements, the researchers suggested that such school-based vision interventions should find ways to ensure that kids consistently wear their glasses and offer replacements when necessary.

To learn more about eyecare for you and your children, read "Sight for Sore Eyes."

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