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**ESSILOR VISION FOUNDATION LAUNCHES *KIDS VISION FOR LIFE – DALLAS COALITION*  
TO PROVIDE GLASSES TO DALLAS ISD CHILDREN WHO WOULDN'T GET THEM OTHERWISE**

***One in four American children suffers from uncorrected vision; if not addressed, they may face lifelong struggles with literacy, low self-esteem, unemployment, poverty, and crime***

**DALLAS (Sept. 25, 2008)** – The surprising reality is that one in four American children has a vision problem – and the number climbs as high as 50% in some inner-city communities – yet research suggests 90% of those children are not wearing glasses today.

Leaders from the Essilor Vision Foundation announced plans today to launch a major initiative to help Dallas ISD children get the vision care they so desperately need to succeed in school and life. Jacques Stoerr, chairman of Essilor Vision Foundation, joined Dallas ISD Superintendent Michael Hinojosa and Dallas Mayor Tom Leppert at Ignacio Zaragoza Elementary School to unveil the *Kids Vision For Life – Dallas Coalition*. The innovative vision care program will be piloted at 20 Dallas ISD schools during the 2008-2009 school year with the long-term goal of expanding to school districts in DFW and across the nation.

In partnership with the Lions Sight and Tissue Foundation, Essilor Vision Foundation will provide free eye exams and glasses to children in grades one through six, who currently cannot afford vision care and do not qualify for other programs such as Medicaid. Essilor Vision Foundation and the Lions organization will work directly with Dallas ISD nursing staff to bring the mobile Vision Coach onsite to schools where optometrists will conduct the exams and eyeglass fittings. Students will choose from popular frames equipped with polycarbonate lenses.

Through this collaboration, as many as 1,500 elementary schoolchildren will receive eye exams and glasses this year.

The Dallas Coalition, another key component of the Essilor Vision Foundation initiative, is believed to be the first-ever community-wide effort to identify children's vision care as a key tool in

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improving literacy skills. The Dallas Coalition will be comprised of community leaders, organizations, and educators. The goal of the coalition is to make sure Dallas children are not left behind academically because of vision problems.

The Essilor Vision Foundation is a non-profit public charity established by Dallas-based Essilor of America, the leading manufacturer and wholesale distributor of optical lenses in the United States.

Essilor Vision Foundation's goal is to eliminate the obstacles – from financial difficulties and transportation issues, to inflexible work schedules and lack of understanding – that prevent a family from getting the necessary exams and glasses for their child.

“Any teacher will tell you. Children must be able to see well to read and learn effectively,” said Stoerr. “Unfortunately, if that doesn't happen, the consequences can be dire. Children with uncorrected vision are more likely to drop out of school and may go on to face lifelong struggles with literacy, low self-esteem, unemployment, poverty and crime.”

He adds that studies show a startling fact – up to 74% of juvenile offenders may have uncorrected vision problems!

In the 2006 - 2007 academic year, school nurses referred 21,000 elementary schoolchildren in Dallas County (including private and public schoolchildren in Mesquite, Richardson, Garland and all the Dallas County suburbs) for eye exams and glasses but only about half of them ever saw an eye doctor. The other half – over 10,000 kids – went back to school without having the appropriate vision care. At Dallas ISD the percentage climbs even higher. According to the Texas Department of State Health Services, during that same year, 57% of Dallas ISD children who were identified in school screenings as needing follow-up eye exams and glasses never received them.

Stoerr applauds the involvement of the Lions Sight and Tissue Foundation and their parent, Lions Club International, an organization focused on vision issues for 91 years.

“Billions are spent on literacy to help children read better and to educate the adult workforce, but little attention is given to vision – one of the most critical and fundamental tools for learning,” said Gene Lefevers, president of the Lions Sight and Tissue Foundation. “Bottom line – good vision will help prepare children for higher skilled jobs in a more competitive world.”

The consequences of uncorrected vision amount to more than a child's inability to see the blackboard or computer screen. According to Dallas optometrist, Clarke D. Newman, O.D., F.A.A.O., Texas school vision screenings – using the Snellen chart – often fail to identify common vision problems, such as astigmatism, hyperopia and tracking problems that can make reading and taking tests extremely difficult.

“Approximately 80% of what a child learns is acquired through their eyes,” said Dr. Newman. “But studies show 60% of children pegged as problem learners or misdiagnosed with attention deficit disorder have vision problems. Their academic success could be significantly improved by just getting glasses.”

Dr. Newman doesn't fault the parents.

"Most parents only know to look for long-distance vision problems ... and a child, especially if they've had vision problems since an early age, may not realize there is anything wrong," said Dr. Newman. "It's our role to begin educating parents about the warning signs and impact of poor vision."

He believes Essilor Vision Foundation initiative holds powerful potential.

"Never before has a community joined together to tackle this problem," said Dr. Newman. "The long-term implications of correcting vision at young age are dramatic and life changing."

Dr. Hinojosa and Dallas ISD leaders strongly support the *Kids Vision For Life* program. He and the Dallas ISD Board of Trustees have established a goal for all Dallas ISD students to graduate from high school college and workforce ready.

"Our principals and teachers are thrilled to have Essilor Vision Foundation spearheading this coalition," said Dr. Hinojosa. "Even with the best teachers and the proper learning tools, the reality is a child's ability to read and learn will be dramatically hindered if he or she can't see well. This is a critical tool that will help our students achieve their goals."

Mayor Leppert, who has launched four different education initiatives in conjunction with Dallas ISD, sees the economic reasons behind supporting the program.

"In the end, poor vision affects us all with increased levels of crime, higher welfare costs, and higher medical costs, and a lower quality workforce," said Mayor Leppert. "It's about connecting the dots. Glasses for kids leads to increased literacy, which results in fewer societal problems and ultimately a stronger economy."

In addition to its commitment to bring free exams and glasses directly to the schools, Essilor Vision Foundation's goal is to explore ways to improve school vision screenings and to educate parents to care for their children's eyes and recognize the warning signs of poor vision. An advisory committee for the *Kids Vision For Life – Dallas Coalition* is being formed and will include leaders such as Mayor Leppert, State Senator Royce West, State Representative Rafael Anchia and many more.

The key partners of Essilor Vision Foundation *Kids Vision For Life – Dallas Coalition* include the Dallas Independent School District and the Lions Sight and Tissue Foundation, along with Education is Freedom, United Way of Metropolitan Dallas, Dallas Public Library, Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Dallas, Dallas County Juvenile Department, Earning by Learning, UNT Health Science Center for Community Health, Circle of Support, Vision Regeneration, The Foundation for Community Empowerment, Northern Texas PGA, Central Dallas Ministries and DFW AHEC (DFW Area Health Education Center).

The Essilor Vision Foundation currently is inviting partners and donors in Dallas to join the coalition so vision care programs can be expanded reach more children in Dallas ISD schools and surrounding school districts. For more information, please contact the Essilor Vision Foundation by calling Audrey Reed, Executive Director, at 972-764-7507 or going to [www.essilorvisionfoundation.org](http://www.essilorvisionfoundation.org).

## **ABOUT THE ESSILOR VISION FOUNDATION**

*Essilor Vision Foundation is a public non-profit charity established by Dallas-based Essilor of America, the leading manufacturer of optical lenses in the United States. The foundation's mission is to achieve better life through better sight by creating and supporting activities that advance good vision and its benefits and offering special help to those who need it most.*

*We strive to give children a brighter future by helping them see the world more clearly. Our programs focus on improving the quality of school vision screenings so fewer children slip through the cracks, providing eye exams and eyeglasses to children who would not get them otherwise, and educating parents and communities about the importance of children's vision care and the role it plays in literacy, society, and the economy.*

## **ABOUT ESSILOR OF AMERICA, INC.**

*Essilor is the leading manufacturer of optical lenses in the United States and is the market leader in progressive, high-index and anti-reflective coated lenses. A pioneer in the development and production of ophthalmic lenses, Essilor employs more than 8,500 people throughout North America. Essilor manufactures optical lenses under the Varilux<sup>®</sup>, Crizal<sup>®</sup>, DEFINITY<sup>®</sup> Thin&Lite<sup>®</sup>, and other Essilor brand names. Essilor Laboratories of America (ELOA) is the largest, and most trusted, optical lab network in the U.S. and offers a wide choice of services and lens brands, including Essilor premium lenses, to eye care professionals across the nation. Essilor of America, Inc. (Essilor) is a subsidiary of Paris-based Essilor International, S.A., a publicly held company traded on the Euronext Paris stock exchange (Reuters: ESSI.PA).*

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## **ABOUT THE LIONS SIGHT AND TISSUE FOUNDATION**

*The Lions Sight & Tissue Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to sight preservation and restoration for residents across North Texas including organ donor sign-up and awareness. The Foundation provides free eyeglasses to children and adults who would otherwise go without corrected vision. In addition, the Foundation coordinates the recycling of used eyeglasses, offers medical assistance, and supports Southwest Transplant Services with the gathering and distribution of corneas, skin, bone, vessels, and heart valves.*