

COMMUNITY VOICES

## Program brings free eye exams to kids

By Christina Mayo

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In February, Miami Lighthouse's Florida Heiken Children's Vision Program mobile optometry clinic visited Cristo Rey Miami High School in North Miami. Students who were uninsured or underinsured received comprehensive eye exams and prescription glasses at no cost to their families.

Once the prescription glasses were ready, a Florida-licensed optician returned to the school to dispense them during a follow-up visit.

The mobile clinic brings care to schools and eliminates the cost, transportation, and time away from work for parents. The program is part of a statewide effort to ensure that every child can see clearly and succeed in school.

"We are grateful to Miami Lighthouse for making vision care accessible to our students. As a corporate work study partner, they help our young people 'see' what is possible through professional exposure and mentorship, and through their outreach, they are ensuring our students have the vision support they need as they pursue the opportunities ahead of them," said Amelie Ferro, Cristo Rey's president and CEO.

The school integrates four years of rigorous academics with four years of professional work experience through its corporate work study program.

The recent visit builds on a collaboration with Miami Lighthouse. Since the start of the school year, four Cristo Rey students have worked as interns to gain administrative skills and firsthand experience in how a nonprofit operates.

Through the recent free exams, 82 percent of the students tested needed prescription glasses. Malikah Auguste, a ninth-grader at Cristo Rey and an intern with Miami Lighthouse, saw the impact the visit had on her classmates.

"Something as simple as getting a pair of glasses can boost a student's confidence so much," Malikah said. "Watching it happen to my own classmates at Cristo Rey made it

even more meaningful for me. It feels good to be part of an organization I truly admire and to bring that kind of impact to my own school community.

“Some students didn’t even know they needed glasses, and now they’re excited to see how this will help them in class and in their everyday lives,” Malikah said.



Malikah Auguste, a student at Cristo Rey Miami High School in North Miami and an intern with Miami Lighthouse, received a free eye exam and new glasses through the Heiken program.  
*Miami Lighthouse*

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Miami Lighthouse One in four children has vision problems that directly impact academic performance, according to the American Optometric Association. Vision problems can often mimic symptoms of ADHD, learning disabilities, or other conditions, making misdiagnoses a common occurrence.

“For many, a pair of glasses is the key to unlocking their potential,” said Virginia A. Jacko, president and CEO of Miami Lighthouse for the Blind & Visually Impaired.

The Florida Heiken Children's Vision Program will visit 32 schools in Miami-Dade County through April providing about 1,478 comprehensive eye exams. Since 1992, the program has provided more than 234,000 comprehensive eye exams, including 16,494 exams and 10,829 pairs of glasses in the 2024–25 school year. Visit

<https://www.miamilighthouse.org>

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