Announcer: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap: The Missouri State University Vision Screening Program provides free vision screenings to the community. Since 2013, it has screened more than 35,000 children and adults across southwest Missouri.

This August, just in time for National Children's Vision and Learning Month, the program will expand its impact into central Missouri – starting with Lebanon. I'm Emily Yeap.

Here with me today to highlight this new development is Dr. Kathy Nordyke, MSU academic service-learning director, and Dr. Sheila Moore, Lebanon R3 school district early childhood director.

Nordyke.

Kathy Nordyke: We really want to ensure that all children have access to vision screenings early on. It's really important to diagnose vision problems in children as early as possible because 80 percent of learning occurs through vision. If children cannot see, it's difficult to learn. Vision problems in children, according to research that's been conducted, is linked to developmental delays, behavioral risk, reduced academic performance, low self-esteem. And this occurs especially when vision problems are left undiagnosed or untreated.

One in four children struggle with vision problems, and these vision problems are heightened in families that are economically disadvantaged because having a vision screening or getting the corrective lenses that are necessary often pose financial hardships, or individuals have lack of access to appropriate care because insurance doesn't cover vision.

Emily Yeap: Trained Missouri State service-learning students will conduct screenings using hi-tech Spot vision cameras.

Kathy Nordyke: Typically in school systems, they use the Snellen Eye Chart. However, the Snellen Eye Chart really can only depict if a child is nearsighted or farsighted. And, that doesn't often get to the root of what the problem is. We use hi-tech vision screening equipment, the Spot camera, which actually takes an internal picture of the eye. And screenings can be conducted as early as six months of age. So, with this, not only do the screenings identify if a child is nearsighted or farsighted, but it also identifies if there are potentially other vision deficiencies that can cause a child to see incorrectly.

Emily Yeap: Moore, a Missouri State alumna, learned about this program at a recent event on campus. She knew it was a right fit for her school district's early childhood center.

Sheila Moore: I was really moved to see we have a program that is helping students and communities with their vision concerns. And so I had the opportunity to speak with the directors at that time, and shared with them my heart and my vision that this would be a tremendous resource for Lebanon, and Lebanon schools want to partner with you and help our community.

Emily Yeap: The screenings will begin at schools and childcare facilities in Lebanon. There are also plans to serve other areas in the Laclede County. Thanks to a grant MSU received from the Allen P. and Josephine B. Green Foundation, help is available to fund eyeglasses for underprivileged children who need them.

Kathy Nordyke: This will allow for 100 children who have been identified by Dr. Moore and her team as being children in need. Each child will receive a $50 scholarship that will cover the cost of frames and lenses through the Vision Rehab Center of the Ozarks, which is our partner organization that we utilize to provide those additional services to children in need.

Emily Yeap: There is a potential to screen about 700 students at the Early Childhood Center throughout the school year.

Sheila Moore: The first five years of a child's life are fundamentally important. They have a direct impact on how children develop learning skills, as well as social and emotional abilities. So having appropriate vision and the corrective lenses that they may possibly need, is crucial. I believe this program will be a tremendous asset to our community. We are in an area that parents and the students are under-resourced. When you talk about eyeglasses, appropriate lenses and even doctor's exams, those result in a cost that some families can't afford. And so I'm looking forward to having an opportunity to provide those students with much needed vision care.

Emily Yeap: To find out more, contact Nordyke at 417-836-5774. I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

Announcer: For more information, contact the office of University Communications at 417-836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at ksmu.org.