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Gwinnett County Public Schools makes parent driver education a priority

Teaching Parents to Take Control Will Help Reverse Trend of County’s First-Place Ranking in Statewide Teen Driver Deaths

Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) will take a leadership role this month in helping teen drivers survive their riskiest years by doing something that has never been done before by a public school system – link a parent educational seminar to the list of criteria associated with campus parking.

Beginning this spring, seven GCPS high schools will launch a pilot program called SafeStart Seminar. These high schools include; Brookwood High, Collins Hill High, GIVE Center East, Grayson High, Norcross High, Parkview High, and South Gwinnett High. Each “SafeStart” school will offer a two-hour, dynamic educational program, designed to help parents understand their role and responsibilities in preparing and protecting teen drivers on the road. A parent will select one of two spring semester dates to attend. Their attendance will be considered as a factor when their teen applies for an on-campus parking permit for the upcoming year. The pilot program will be fully implemented in all GCPS high schools beginning the 2008-09 school year, with three seminar dates offered per school to ensure that an estimated 25,000 parents hear the important message.

“Gwinnett County Public Schools is pleased to join its community partners to bring these seminars to our high schools,” said J. Alvin Wilbanks, CEO/Superintendent. “Teen driving safety is an important community issue. Sadly, we are reminded how important when we hear of accidents involving teen drivers. We all must work together– schools, families, and communities– to ensure our young drivers are ready for the road.”

SafeStart Seminar was developed by RoadWise America, a driver education curriculum company based in Duluth, in partnership with the National Safety Council. The unique parent educational program features a detailed 10-step action plan, award-winning videos, an informative resource packet, an expert panel and a Q&A session that empower parents to monitor and take immediate action no matter where their teen driver is in the learning process.

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Parents learn to evaluate teen driver competency, put controls in place, and gradually introduce more complex scenarios so that teens can gain experience under less risk in their early years of driving. At least 80% of teens crash within their first three years behind the wheel.

“After presenting parent seminars (formerly called Parents Deserve a Brake) to more than 20 high schools in metro Atlanta and working with parents in our own driving school since 2001, we know without a doubt that parents are the missing link to reducing the number of teen deaths on our roads and highways,” said Carey Odum, RoadWise founder and CEO. “For years, Gwinnett County has placed first in the state in a category that no one wants to lead— teen driver deaths,” added Bob Wilson, Director of the Georgia Chapter of the National Safety Council. “We are committed to getting more parents involved to ensure that our roads are safer for everyone.”

Georgia ranks 4th nationwide for the highest number of teen driver deaths, according to a recent report from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. Most independent studies agree that the most important factor that affects teen driving—greater than formal training, stricter laws, safer cars or improved roads— is parental involvement.

Studies indicate that most parents are not aware of the extent of teens’ high-risk driving behaviors, nor do they believe that their own teens fit behaviors described in statistics about the typical teen. Most parents allow their teens to drive in dangerous situations within the first few months after receiving a license, and nearly half are misinformed about the main causes of teen crashes. Although 93% of parents in one survey said they felt prepared to teach their teens to drive, 60% of those same parents were not familiar with their state’s graduated licensing laws that apply to teens. When parents are questioned about their liability in teen crashes, most say they don’t know the laws or the extent of their liability.

Participating Gwinnett high schools will promote the upcoming meetings, informing parents and students of registration opportunities.

For more information, news media representatives should contact the following Safestart Seminar representatives:

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