



May 13, 2008

from the office of Superintendent Robert Collins



“Every Fifteen Minutes” Impacts Grossmont High School Students

Wednesday, April 30, was a special day on the Grossmont High School campus, as students, the Highway Patrol, El Cajon Police Department and the El Cajon Fire Department staged “Every Fifteen Minutes,” a realistic dramatization of a traffic accident involving a teenage driver under the influence of alcohol and two fatalities. The initial accident, the use of the “Jaws of Life,” the transporting of victims and the deceased, and the arrest of the teenager all kept the attention of several hundred students of driving age. A follow-up meeting was held the next day with students.



California Highway Patrol Captain Brian Pennings explained that *every fifteen minutes a similar accident occurs somewhere in the United States*. The program was excellent and our entire District owes a debt of gratitude to the California Highway Patrol and El Cajon Police and Fire Departments. Like all parents, ***our concern is for the safety of all of our students both in and out of school***. At the same time, Captain Pennings reminded students that the most dangerous time of their lives is the junior and senior years of high school. More accidents and deaths occur during a young person’s first year of driving than at any other time. These statistics are a constant reminder to all school staff and parents about the need to address teenage drinking.

The Need for an Ongoing Program

I am sure that there is no one reading this newsletter who does not ***personally know of a teenager tragically killed*** in an automobile accident. Over 6,000 died last year in the United States. Teen drivers account for 12.6% of all drivers involved in fatal crashes. The fatal crash rate for drivers 16 to 19 is four times that of other drivers. The risk is highest at age 16, when the fatal crash rate is 40% higher than for 18 year olds.

As effective as Every Fifteen Minutes is, we know that this is only a start. ***We need to regularly communicate a message of safe driving, and alcohol and drug abuse prevention***. It is a message that must be conveyed to students and their families in each high school, throughout the year.

I do not believe we can ignore the issue and hope that it goes away. It is our intent to put into place a comprehensive ***“Safe Teen Driving Program”*** beginning in the fall 2008 for all students. The program will be designed to help parents communicate with their child regarding safe driving practices. It will heighten both student and parent awareness of the dangers of teenage driving and alcohol and drug abuse. Through school programs, the District website, parent-teen driver contract and other forms of communication, we will provide staff, parents and students with information and strategies to address this issue in the coming year. ***The goal is to provide avenues to open a dialogue between parents and students so that we can defy the statistics of teen driving***.

This coming school year, as ***partners with every parent***, we hope to be able to address teen driving issues as well as other issues that face parents of teenagers, such as alcohol abuse and drugs. It is about ongoing communication and dialogue with our students. The message is clear, ***the Grossmont Union High School District cares about strong academic achievement and the well-being of each student and family***.