“Distractology” takes high school students for a ride

Huntington- This past week, students at Gateway Regional High School got the chance to partake in a distracted driving simulator. The simulator, known as “Distractology”, is based on research conducted by a group at UMASS Amherst, and funded by the Arbella Insurance Foundation.

The event was sponsored by Gateway’s student council, enticing many students to participate. Each student who completed the simulation received a fifteen dollar gas card to Exxon Mobil as reward for their time and effort. Northwestern District Attorney David Sullivan made the trip out to Gateway to observe the simulation in action, as well as Huntington police Chief Robert Garriepy. A reporter from Western Mass News--Taylor Jacobs--also made his way to the school and interviewed Gateway Senior Ryley Carleton to get a feel for what Distractology was really like.

Data from a 2015 report from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports that drivers aged 15-19 represent the largest proportion (9%) of drivers who were distracted at the time of fatal car crashes. In 2015, nearly 3,500 people were killed and 391,000 injured in motor vehicle accidents involving distracted drivers.

The simulator brings students through real life driving scenarios related to distracted driving. One of the first scenarios that participants faced was attempting to send a text while trying to focus on the road. It ended in many of the students crashing into the car in front of them. That first scenario showed just how difficult it is to drive while distracted. Taking your eyes off of the road even for the two seconds it takes to send a quick text could be the difference between getting home safe and causing a horrific accident.

Students saw other scenarios as well, such as having to stop for a motorcycle that sped through a stop sign, and changing a song while driving fifty-five miles per hour on the highway. Each situation was nerve wracking, as the students had no idea what would happen next. This is much like driving in the real world, which is what makes the simulation such a worthwhile experience. Simulators such as Distractology are especially important for young and inexperienced drivers to show them just how alert you have to be at all times while operating a vehicle. Always drive distraction free and pay attention to your surroundings; you never know what might lie ahead!

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Photo (left to right): Huntington Police Chief Robert Garriepy, Principal Jason Finnie, Student Council Adviser Avery Wing, and Northwestern District Attorney David Sullivan with Distractology staff Patrick Brough and Nick Romani Prpich.