



Whittier Union HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

To Achieve and Maintain Excellence...

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 5, 2023 **CONTACT:** Andrea Garcia **PHONE:** 909-447-2403

Whittier Union Students Receive Insight to Dangers of Impaired Driving

WHITTIER – Pioneer High School students were witness to the real-life consequences of impaired driving during the “Every 15 Minutes” program, a two-day event held April 3-4 that included a simulated live-action car crash, rescue efforts, the dramatized death of students, an overnight retreat and a mock funeral.

During the program, Pioneer High students watched as a staged 911 call triggered an emergency response by local law enforcement agencies, firefighters and paramedics. The students saw victims treated by medical professionals, a crash survivor questioned by police and arrested, and a mortally wounded passenger placed on a stretcher and taken to the morgue.

The staged crash involved Pioneer High students serving in a variety of roles, including as car crash victims and as a group of gruesomely made-up “walking dead” who stood silently observing the crash scene, while the Grim Reaper, portrayed by a Pioneer High assistant principal, moved about the crash scene with his sickle.

Pioneer High senior Ashley Villasenor volunteered to play a crash victim survivor, channeling the memory of a car crash that her older sister was involved in, an accident that claimed the life of her sister’s friend.

“I wanted to do this because it’s important for my classmates to know what can happen when you drink and drive,” Villasenor said. “We think alcohol and smoking are fun things to do, but it can lead to tragedy if you are behind the wheel of a car...and not just for those in the car, but innocent bystanders and pedestrians too.”

Pioneer High Associated Student Body president Jose Aguilar, whose parents were in a car accident in which the vehicle spun out and flipped over, echoed a similar sentiment, urging his classmates to be cautious about their actions.

“As high school students we can be a little naïve when it comes to driving. We think we can speed or drive recklessly and get away with it,” Aguilar said. “We need to be more knowledgeable about how being distracted accelerates the risks when we are driving. It’s a good lesson for all of us.”

For Pioneer High Principal Mary Chapman, the event required the participation of nearly every school administrator, teacher and staff member. Counselors and mental health professionals were available throughout the day to talk to students who found the simulation frightening or just needed to talk.

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“We started planning this in the fall. It’s all hands on deck,” Chapman said. “Every Pioneer administrator, teacher and counselor was on board for this. Our own Cosmetology Club students, working with a professional artist, did the makeup on all our student volunteers. This is Titan pride at its best.”

After the staging of the car crash, individual students were pulled from their classes to underscore the dire reality that every 15 minutes someone dies from an alcohol-related traffic collision. These students were taken to an isolated location on campus, and not allowed to communicate with friends or family, to further emphasize that they were no longer part of the community.

During an overnight retreat on April 3, student participants lost contact with family and friends and heard emotional stories from people who had been involved in or affected by drunken driving.

On April 4, a mock funeral was staged inside Pioneer High’s gymnasium, during which parents of the student participants shared the emotional impact they felt in losing their child, albeit just for one day. Students then watched a video recap of the previous day’s events and heard from guest speakers who spoke about drunken driving and the importance of understanding how it impacts family members and communities.

“Every 15 Minutes” is a national campaign focused on high school juniors and seniors that aims to challenge students to think about the dangers of drunken driving. The campaign encourages students to think about the impact that their decisions can have on their family, friends and community.

The two-day program was held in partnership with the City of Whittier, Whittier Police Department, Los Angeles County Fire Department and California Highway Patrol.

“Every life is precious, and we present the ‘Every 15 Minutes’ program to our students because we want them all to be in their caps and gowns when they receive their diploma during commencement,” Superintendent Dr. Monica Oviedo said. “We want our students to have conversations with their friends, with their families, and understand the importance of being responsible adults at all times, but especially when they are driving.”

PHOTO CAPTIONS

WUHS_D_EVERY15MINUTES1: A Pioneer High School student undergoes questioning from the California Highway Patrol during the school’s “Every 15 Minutes” program, which included a simulated live-action car crash on April 3.

WUHS_D_EVERY15MINUTES2: Student volunteers from Pioneer high School receive theatrical makeup from the school’s Cosmetology Club and a professional makeup artist during the “Every 15 Minutes” program on April 3.

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OUR MISSION:

The Whittier Union High School District provides all students with an engaging, quality standards-based instructional program delivered by a well-trained staff resulting in improved student achievement. Whittier Union High School District works to achieve and maintain excellence in providing a comprehensive education for all students.

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