



WHITTIER UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

To Achieve and Maintain Excellence...

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 24, 2025 **CONTACT:** Andrea Garcia **PHONE:** 909-447-2403

Whittier Union Students Receive Powerful Lesson During DUI Car Crash Simulation

WHITTIER – Pioneer High School students received an opportunity to see how the real-life consequences of driving drunk, distracted, or impaired can have devastating and tragic results for their friends, family, and community during an “Every 15 Minutes” demonstration held in front of the school on March 18.

The staged simulation for Pioneer High juniors and seniors – featuring the participation of the California Highway Patrol (CHP), Los Angeles County Sheriff, City of Whittier Police Dept., Los Angeles County Fire Dept., first responders, and Funeraria de Angel Pico Rivera mortuary – took the students through an entire DUI car crash scenario – the initial 911 call, the rescue of victims, a sobriety test, and the subsequent arrest of the driver.

Throughout the demonstration, a Pioneer High student playing the Grim Reaper, clad all in black, watched over the proceedings, while a group of Pioneer students with skeletal faces representing the “Walking Dead,” stood solemnly by and observed the proceedings.

“This is a day where we see a lot of emotions from the students. There is something about seeing their peers in a car crash or being led away by the Grim Reaper – even if it’s staged – that really hits home for the kids,” Pioneer High School Principal Mary Chapman said. “There is a sense of connectedness to the simulation, the realization it could be them or someone they love next.”

Prior to the simulation, the Grim Reaper, accompanied by a CHP officer, the dean of students and a school counselor, walked into classrooms and removed a student every 15 minutes, representing the lives of people who die every 15 minutes due to an accident caused by a driver that was under the influence or distracted. Obituaries were read to the class to announce their death.

The students removed from class spent the night in an isolated retreat, with no communication devices, until the next morning, when the second part of the demonstration – the funeral services for the victims – took place in the Pioneer gymnasium.

This year the Grim Reaper was portrayed by Pioneer High senior Gavin Garcia.

“It’s pretty nerve-wracking to think about going into class and removing one of my classmates,” Garcia said. “I have a family member who was hit by a drunk driver. Fortunately, for my family, no one was injured, but it was really scary. ‘Every 15 Minutes’ really opens your eyes and makes you realize how precious life is.”

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Pioneer High Assistant Principal Marvin Jacobo orchestrated the "Every 15 Minutes" event, consulting with student volunteers portraying victims or the "Walking Dead" and their families and discussing the emotional effects of being involved in the simulation. Likewise, after the demonstration, Pioneer guidance counselors were available throughout the day to talk to students who needed help processing what they had just seen.

When choosing students to play the roles of car crash victims or the "Walking Dead," the Pioneer team looked for students from different social circles so that the sobering message of the day could be taken back to their friends. The timing of the simulation is important too. Pioneer prefers to stage it in the run-up to prom season, a night when the dangers of teenagers driving drunk or distracted are known to greatly enhance.

For the first time, Pioneer High enlisted students enrolled in the school's PREP afterschool cosmetology program to design and apply all the make-up to crash victims and the "Walking Dead," led by Pioneer High Class of 2017 alumni and current PREP coordinator Isaiah Huizar, who trained the students to apply the make-up and provided all the materials.

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

"Though the images seen may be disturbing to our students, it is imperative that they understand that they need to be responsible and aware when behind the wheel and that lives can be destroyed in a matter of seconds when bad decisions are made," Superintendent Dr. Monica Oviedo said. "We hope our students will heed these lessons and go on to live rich and fulfilling lives."

PHOTO CAPTIONS

WUHS_15MINUTES1: A Pioneer High School student participates in the "Every 15 Minutes" demonstration held in front of the school on March 18, where students received a glimpse into the real-life consequences of driving under the influence.

WUHS_15MINUTES2: A Pioneer High School student is checked on by a California Highway Patrol officer as part of the "Every 15 Minutes" demonstration held at Pioneer High on March 18.

WUHS_15MINUTES3: A group of Pioneer High students with skeletal faces represent the "Walking Dead" as part of the "Every 15 Minutes" demonstration on March 18.

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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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