

Better Teen Drivers in the Making

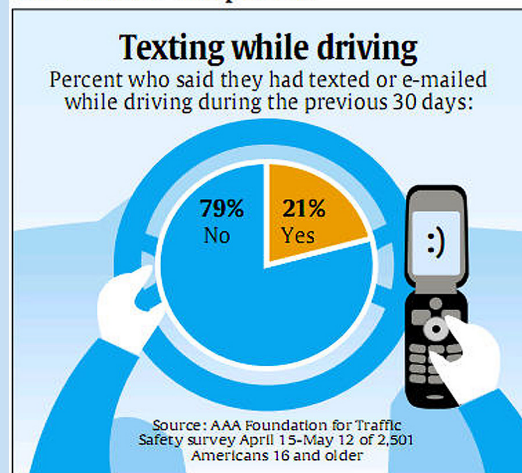
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The tragedy of distracted driving and a multiplicity of solutions

The collection of articles in this case study considers the problem of dangerous and distracted driving as well as several solutions to it. Two articles look at the statistical reality of and personal tragedy caused by drunk driving. And the remaining two look at two very different ways two groups are tackling the problem. One shows how good can come out of tragedy as a high school in Illinois used one teen’s death and his twin’s extensive injuries as a national springboard to encourage other teens to pay attention while driving. The second article looks at how law enforcement officials are attempting to tackle the problem, with highway patrol chiefs and other safety experts cooperating and campaigning together.

USA TODAY Snapshots®



By Anne R. Carey and Keith Simmons, USA TODAY

Wreck's tragedy holds many lessons

Survivor of car crash that killed twin shares safe-driving message with teens

By Larry Copeland
USA TODAY

Stephen Arends and his family are experts on the perils of teen driving. That expertise came at a tremendous cost.

Arends was 17 when his twin brother Greg lost control of the car they were riding in and crashed into a telephone pole.

Greg, who had been speeding, was killed. Stephen, who was with his brother that day only because he had gotten a speeding ticket the month before, was severely injured. He was in a coma for six months and suffers permanent mental and physical effects of brain injury. He speaks very slowly, each word an individual act of great labor.

"I really do think that we should change the driving age to 18, so the youth have more expertise and maturity and better knowledge," says Stephen, now 21 and a senior at Gibson City-Melvin-Sibley High School in Gibson City, Ill.

The dangers teens encounter on the road because of the behavior of young drivers and their passengers are well documented. In 2005, the latest year for which complete figures are available, 7,460 drivers ages 15-20 were involved in fatal crashes, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. That year, 3,467 drivers in that age group were killed and 281,000 others were injured in crashes, the agency says.

Research on teen driving is intensifying. The latest entry is a study being released today of the driving habits of 5,665 ninth-, 10th- and 11-graders by Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and State Farm

Insurance Companies, a partnership that previously conducted the largest study of children in crashes.

A grueling recovery

The Arends twins' crash happened 3 miles from the family's 2,200-acre farm in Melvin, a town of 500 about 100 miles southwest of Chicago. When Stephen's mother, Bonnie Arends, 44, drove past the accident site en route to the hospital, she didn't think

Loose laws

States cited as having "marginal" licensing standards for young drivers:

- ▶ Arkansas
- ▶ Idaho
- ▶ Kansas
- ▶ Minnesota
- ▶ Mississippi
- ▶ Montana
- ▶ New Mexico
- ▶ North Dakota
- ▶ South Carolina
- ▶ South Dakota

Source: Insurance Institute for Highway Safety

As seen in USA TODAY NEWS Section, Thursday, January 25, 2007 Page 3A

either of her sons had survived.

Stephen did survive the Jan. 17, 2003, wreck. His mother and father, Randy Arends, also 44, spent much of the next year sitting at his bedside, praying for his recovery, eventually helping him relearn basic motor skills - things like brushing his teeth and combing his hair.

When Stephen finally took his first steps after the wreck, nurses at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago cheered and wept, his mother says.

That might have been that, but a remarkable thing happened. The Arends twins became a powerful lesson for teen drivers in the communities around Gibson City and Melvin.

A teen-driver safety program begun at Stephen's high school was named by State Farm as the most effective in the nation last year. Stephen and other students travel around the region and state talking with teens about being safer drivers.

Stephen says he does it "because this had such a monumental impact on my life."

Researchers say the Arends twins are typical of the teens they surveyed and that the information they gleaned can be used to create successful intervention programs such as the one in Gibson City.

"We've known who gets into crashes," says Flaura Koplín Winston, a pediatrician and director of the Center for Injury Research and Prevention at Children's Hospital. "Now, we're starting to know why. The Arends family are a typical example of what we saw. Here's

a family who had such wonderful kids. And the boys sped. And the parents didn't really recognize the dangers associated with that."

Winston says researchers were encouraged by how much sway parents still have over teen driving behavior. For example, 66% of the teens surveyed say their parents could influence their use of a cellphone while driving; just 47% say their peers would have the same influence.

The Arends say they know now how critical parental influence is. Randy Arends urges other parents

to "be very aware of what your kids are doing. Spend some time with them driving. Do what you can to discourage them from getting a license too soon." Adds Bonnie Arends: "We just don't want to see anybody else go through the pain and the terror."

The teen driving program they support at Gibson City-Melvin-Sibley High School is working, school officials say. Seat belt usage among students there

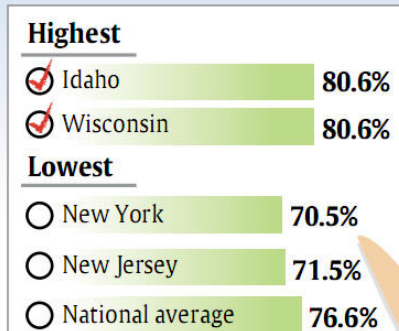
is up from 66% to 85%, and accidents involving drivers ages 16-18 dropped last year.

"In my 22 years as a driver's ed teacher, this has been the only thing that has changed the teen driving attitudes," says Judy Weber-Jones, who started "Project Ignition" in the fall of 2005. "In 2005 and 2006, we had six students who came to us and said the program saved their lives. They started wearing seat belts because of the program, and the seat belt saved their lives."

USA TODAY Snapshots®

Driver tests: Best and worst

Test scores on a 20-question exam similar to written DMV tests in most states:



Source: 2009 GMAC Insurance test of 5,183 licensed drivers (nationaldriverstest.com)

By Anne R. Carey and Veronica Salazar, USA TODAY

Saving young lives

Tazewell County, near Gibson City, recorded 15 teen deaths in car wrecks in 15 months, Weber-Jones says. On July 13, the Project Ignition students made a presentation at the high school. "They haven't had any fatalities since then," she says.

Lucas Pulley, 18, a senior at Gibson City-Melvin-Sibley High School, has been part of Project Ignition from the beginning. "I buckle my seat belt 100% of the time now," he says. "I'll be driving along and realize I have it on, and I don't even remember putting it on. I don't speed anymore. I realize I can be a little late, and it's better than not being alive."

He says the Arendses' accident "was a blow on the entire county. Those boys were so active in every-

thing. I had a brother and a sister in high school with them. My brother and sister were just dejected. It was the worst I've ever seen them."

Weber-Jones says Project Ignition is successful because it emphasizes teens working with other teens. "As adults, we've been preaching for years to buckle up, don't speed," she says. "But when it comes from their peers, it really hits home and gets the message across. When it comes from another teen, they listen."

In September 2005, Stephen Arends spoke to an assembly at his high school. "He said, 'I once sat where you are, and I thought I was invincible,'" Bonnie Arends says. "The gym was silent. To see the result of a crash and think that could happen to a normal kid, I think it was pretty shocking to those students."

9% of us admit to driving drunk

Study: Attitudes don't mirror behavior

By Larry Copeland
USA TODAY

Despite nearly 30 years of media campaigns detailing the dangers of drunken driving, almost one in 11 people admit to driving when they thought they were legally intoxicated, according to a survey released today by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

Of 2,509 adults surveyed, 9% said they had driven within the previous 30 days when they believed their blood-alcohol content was .08% or above, the legal threshold for drunken driving in all states and Washington, D.C. The AAA Foundation is a research and education group founded by AAA auto club in 1947.

The results resemble those of an unrelated, larger study released last week by the federal government. The Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration's survey of 127,000 adults found that 15% of drivers 18 and older said they had driven under the influence of alcohol at least once in the previous year.

"It's frightening," says Aaron White, adjunct assistant professor of psychiatry at Duke University Medical Center who studies drunken driving among young people. "If you've got 10% of the people saying, 'I drove when I was over the legal limit,' you've probably got another chunk of people that would say, 'I drank and drove, but I wasn't over the limit.'"

White and his colleagues just completed a study of 5,000 recent high school graduates; they found 10% of the grads had drunk and driven within two weeks of being questioned. "The only thing that really works on a nationwide level is changing the culture," White says. "I think it's improving, but we still have a relaxed attitude toward drunken driving."

The most effective way to combat that attitude is with mandatory ignition interlocks for anyone convicted of drunken driving, says Heidi Castle, vice president of communications for Mothers Against Drunk Driving. "People continue to drive drunk because they can, and ignition interlocks stop that," she says.

Mixed signals

Drivers list behind-the-wheel behavior they say is hazardous – and admit they do it:

Distracted driving

- ▶ 82% call it a serious problem.
- ▶ 54% of those drivers say they talked on cellphones while driving in previous 30 days.

Speeding

- ▶ 74% call it a serious problem.
- ▶ 40% of those drivers admit driving 15 mph or more over the speed limit on major highway in previous 30 days.

Running red lights

- ▶ 71% call it a serious problem.
- ▶ 57% of those drivers admit speeding up to get through yellow lights in previous 30 days.

Source: AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety survey of 2,509 U.S. adults Oct. 25-Jan. 10. Survey conducted by NuStats LLC.

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“I don’t know that there’s a single answer” for reaching motorists who still drive drunk, says Peter Kissinger, CEO of AAA Foundation. “Additional education is part of it. Increased enforcement is part of the solution. There is a sense that our elected officials don’t have the political courage to put known countermeasures into law. We’ve made wonderful progress, but there are still elected officials that get hung up on the issue of privacy and Big Brother looking over us.”

Highway safety agencies and safe driving advocates have been stymied by their inability to further cut crash deaths involving drunken drivers, which have remained at about 32% of all fatalities for the past decade.

“Drivers see traffic laws as guidance or suggestions, not as a law,” says Jonathan Adkins, spokesman for the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA), which represents state and territorial highway safety offices. “Drivers rationalize that it’s OK to

commit these behaviors since it’s everyone else that crashes, not me.”

GHSA supports sobriety checkpoints as an effective tool against drunken driving. They reduce such fatalities by 10%-20% -- not because of the number of motorists caught but because they deter people from driving drunk in the first place, says James Fell, senior program director at the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation who also spent 30 years at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Fell headed an NHTSA study that found that checkpoints in Tennessee cut drunken-driving injuries and fatalities by about 20%. Ten states prohibit checkpoints.

Mark Sieve, a Sarasota, Fla., waiter who was convicted of drunken driving in 1996, says the night he was arrested wasn’t the first time he’d driven after drinking.

“Why would they drive knowing all the dangers out there? Habit, I think. And attitude,” says Sieve, 48. “It’s difficult for people who’ve been in the habit of drinking a certain amount and driving. Many times it takes a DUI arrest for their behavior to change.”

Girl's death not just a statistic

N.C. teenager studied fatal collisions

By Larry Copeland
USA TODAY

Shannon Nicole Adkins had devoted herself to doing something about the wave of teen crash fatalities in her North Carolina county.

She studied teen highway deaths as her senior project at Clayton High School before graduating last spring. She changed her major at Wayne Community College from dental hygiene to criminal justice, says her aunt, Karmela Adkins.

Then on Saturday night she was killed in a head-on collision just a few blocks from her home, the victim of an alleged drunken driver.

"She enjoyed working with the police," Karmela Adkins says of her 18-year-old niece. "She really wanted to go out and try to keep these kids from dying."

Shannon Nicole Adkins' death is more than one family's tragedy. She's the 27th teen to die in a crash in Johnston County since the start of 2006, more than in any of the state's other 99 counties.

The county's high teen death toll - and the highway deaths of more than 1,200 North Carolina drivers age 20 and younger between 1997 and 2006 - have prompted a statewide effort to improve high school driver's education programs. The state medical examiner's office asked a task force to study the programs and make recommendations to the state Legislature, says Deborah Radisch, associate chief medical examiner.

Losing young drivers

Shannon Nicole Adkins' death adds urgency to that effort, says Mayor Norman Johnson of Smithfield, the

Johnston County seat. "We've lost so many."

Ernestine Adkins was at her home in Clayton, N.C., on Saturday night, waiting for Shannon Nicole, who had called to say she was on the way home. Adkins and her husband, Douglas, heard a crash she says sounded "like an explosion."

They went to the scene a few blocks away and found that Shannon Nicole, their only child, had been killed in a head-on collision with a truck that had crossed into her lane. "I'm no longer anybody's mother," Ernestine Adkins, 50, says, her voice breaking. "And I'll never be a grandmother. This is the end of my family tree."

Johnston is a "very rural county where the population is really burgeoning," says Rob Foss, director of the Center for the Study of Young Drivers at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. "There's just a lot of people driving on these narrow, curvy, really dangerous roads."

The Johnston County Commission earlier this year formed a separate task force on teen-driver safety. Among the ideas being considered: a driver awareness program for teens, a video of young drivers demonstrating safe driving habits and rides with sheriff's deputies.

Driver's ed is 'antiquated'

Traditional driver's ed courses are inadequate for the challenges faced by today's young drivers, critics say. "Driver's education in this country is antiquated," Foss says. "The notion that the way to educate young people about driving is to give them 30 hours of classroom training and six hours of actual driving is just ridiculous."

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Many states have mandated more stringent requirements for drivers' education. But 20 others also use the 30-and-6 model, according to a report by the American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association, which represents traffic safety educators. There are far more cars on the road now, Foss says. "And there are distractions in vehicles that didn't exist even 10 years ago, much less 60 years ago."

The state task force decided early that North Carolina should keep its state-financed driver's ed program, which trains 100,000 students a year. Members will study whether using simulators could help young drivers and whether parents can do more, says Foss, a task force member.

Shannon Nicole Adkins completed her school's driver's ed program and was a good driver, her mother says: "When she was working on her senior project,

she rode with the Johnston County sheriff's deputies, and we have a family friend who owns a wrecker service. She rode with him, too, and she had seen firsthand some of these wrecks. She really cared about trying to change things."

The other driver, Desiree Olsen, 29, who was thrown from her truck, was in good condition Tuesday in a Raleigh hospital. She was charged with felony death by motor vehicle, while the primary element of the charge is driving while intoxicated, says State Highway Patrol Sgt. T.L. Gibson.

The Johnston County task force on teen-driver safety will hold its first meeting Thursday evening. Shannon Nicole Adkins was planning to attend.

Instead, her funeral was Tuesday in Clayton.

Stepped-up patrol efforts help save lives

Campaigns promote seat-belt use, nab drunken drivers

By Larry Copeland, David Unze, Laura Bruno
and Karl Puckett
USA TODAY

Nearly every state that recorded a drop in traffic deaths last year attributes part of the decline to Americans driving less. But highway patrol chiefs, traffic safety directors and independent experts say other factors also contributed.

83% of vehicle occupants buckled up during daylight hours, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Some law enforcement officials and safety advocacy groups say traffic deaths also fell because of targeted law enforcement efforts; a preventive focus on young drivers, and more partnerships among state and local police and others.



Years of crackdowns on seat-belt violations and drunken driving - "Click It or Ticket" and "Over the Limit, Under Arrest" - may be having a cumulative effect in a number of states, some officials say.

"I think the (campaigns) have a huge impact," says Pam Fischer, director of the Division of Highway Traffic Safety in New Jersey, where road deaths fell 18% last year. "The message is getting out there and the police are visible."

Seat-belt use last year rose to the highest level ever -

AAA, the motorists club, says that universal motorcycle helmet laws, improved driver licensing systems for young people and laws that allow police to stop motorists solely for not wearing seat belts can cut deaths, spokesman Troy Green says.

David Harkey, director of the University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center, cautions that more study is needed to determine the actual impact of such efforts. "It's much too early to start making the correlation that certain programs or

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certain interventions are what have improved our safety record," he says.

Targeted enforcement

Gone are the days when police and state troopers patrolled mile after mile of highway in search of a speeder or drunken driver: Law enforcement budgets were hammered by high gasoline prices early last year and, later on, by the shrinking economy. Also, technology now allows officers to concentrate enforcement in areas where the most problems occur.

In Minnesota, where traffic deaths dropped 17%, police use detailed crash data identifying areas, times and days of the week where the most wrecks occur to target certain areas for increased patrols.

"We've all taken this situation of traffic safety very seriously, and it has provided some significant, measurable outcomes," says Michael Campion of the Minnesota Department of Public Safety.

Montana used a similar strategy. Col. Mike Tooley, chief of the state Highway Patrol, says troopers targeted drunken and reckless driving, speeding and seat-belt violations along high-wreck "crash corridors." A six-officer team worked with local police. Citations rose sharply for several traffic offenses compared with the year before. Drunken-driving citations climbed from 2,375 to 3,347; reckless driving, 348 to 569; speeding, 37,494 to 49,683, and seat-belt violations, 12,718 to 17,454.

New Jersey state troopers patrol using data on high-crash locations. "What we've been doing probably is having a good effect," says Sgt. Stephen Jones of the New Jersey State Police. "What we're doing is working."

Focus on young drivers

Young drivers are the most vulnerable. Automobile crashes are the leading cause of death for teens in the USA. Mile for mile, they are involved in three times as many fatal crashes as all other drivers, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says.

Officials in South Dakota tout "Alive at 25," a National Safety Council program developed in Colorado that teaches young drivers how to survive potentially deadly crashes.

Single-vehicle crashes in which the automobile leaves the road and rolls over are among the most common wrecks on South Dakota roads, says J.C. Carpenter, director of the state Office of Highway Safety. The program teaches drivers 15-24 what to do - and what not to do - if their car leaves the road. "Some of these situations will be life-saving to them," Carpenter says.

Traffic death totals, by state

States are finalizing traffic death totals for 2008. Some numbers are preliminary and could change. (N.A. means not available.)

State	2008	2007	Pct. change	State	2008	2007	Pct. change
Ala.	913	1,110	-18%	Neb.	207	256	-19%
Alaska	63	82	-23%	Nev.	323	373	-13%
Ariz.	920	1,071	-14%	N.H.	139	129	+8%
Ark.	590	650	-9%	N.J.	594	724	-18%
Calif.	N.A.			N.M.	361	413	-13%
Colo.	543	554	-2%	N.Y.	N.A.		
Conn.	292	296	-1%	N.C.	1,383	1,704	-19%
Del.	122	118	+3%	N.D.	104	111	-6%
D.C.	38	54	-30%	Ohio	1,150	1,257	-9%
Fla.	2,986	3,221	-7%	Okla.	694	754	-8%
Ga.	1,472	1,648	-11%	Ore.	414	452	-8%
Hawaii	107	138	-22%	Pa.	N.A.		
Idaho	241	269	-10%	R.I.	67	69	-3%
Ill.	1,044	1,248	-16%	S.C.	915	1,077	-15%
Ind.	814	898	-9%	S.D.	121	146	-17%
Iowa	409	445	-8%	Tenn.	1,005	1,211	-17%
Kan.	384	416	-8%	Texas	N.A.		
Ky.	828	864	-4%	Utah	271	299	-9%
La.	907	993	-9%	Vt.	73	66	+11%
Maine	153	183	-16%	Va.	817	1,026	-20%
Md.	560	615	-9%	Wash.	504	568	-11%
Mass.	318	434	-27%	W.Va.	380	432	-12%
Mich.	951	1,088	-13%	Wis.	589	739	-20%
Minn.	424	510	-17%	Wyo.	159	149	+7%
Miss.	768	884	-13%				
Mo.	958	992	-3%				
Mont.	228	276	-17%				

Sources: State transportation agencies and highway patrols; Governors Highway Safety Association; National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Other efforts in the state include public service television ads in which tearful parents who have lost children to drunken drivers plead with teens not to drink and drive.

In Illinois, where fatalities fell 16% last year to the lowest total since 1923, officials say a drastic drop in teen road deaths drove the overall decline. "We went into over 100 schools last year," says Michael Stout, director of the Division of Traffic Safety at the Illinois Department of Transportation. "We gave schools money, and students were put in traffic safety programs. Teen deaths dropped 41% from 155 in 2007 to 92 in 2008."

Tennessee Highway Patrol Lt. Tony Barham says partnerships between the state patrol and police in neighboring states have helped reduce fatalities.

The Minnesota departments of Public Safety, Transportation and Health lead an interagency partnership called "Toward Zero Deaths." Its goal: 400 or fewer fatalities statewide by 2010 (last year's preliminary total was 424). Other partners include state and local police, the Federal Highway Administration, the Minnesota County Engineers Association and the University of Minnesota's Center for Transportation Studies, Campion says.

Contributing:

Larry Copeland and Drew FitzGerald, USA TODAY; Ron Barnett, The Greenville (S.C.) News; Joanne Bratton, The Baxter Bulletin, Mountain Home, Ark.; Laura Bruno, Daily Record, Morris County, N.J.; Clay Carey, The Tennessean, Nashville; Jennie Coughlin, The News Leader, Staunton, Va.; Matthew Dane-man, Rochester (N.Y.) Democrat and Chronicle; Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal; Tim Evans, The Indianapolis Star; Jessie Halladay, The (Louisville) Courier-Journal; Trevor Hughes, Fort Collins (Colo.) Coloradoan; Ben Jones, The Post-Crescent, Appleton, Wis.; Chris Joyner, The Clarion-Ledger, Jackson, Miss.; Greg Latshaw, The Daily Times, Salisbury, Md.; Tracy Loew, Statesman Journal, Salem (Ore.); Jeff Martin, Argus Leader, Sioux Falls, S.D.; Maureen Milford, The News Journal, Wilmington, Del.; Dan Nakaso, The Honolulu Advertiser; Rick Neale, Florida Today, Melbourne; Ashley Northington, The Times, Shreveport, La.; Brian Passey, The Spectrum, St. George, Utah; Karl Puckett, Great Falls (Mont.) Tribune; Marty Roney, Montgomery (Ala.) Advertiser; Jordan Schrader, Asheville (N.C.) Citizen-Times; Adam Silverman, The Burlington (Vt.) Free Press; David Unze, St. Cloud (Minn.) Times; Dirk Vander-Hart, Springfield (Mo.) News-Leader; Dennis Wagner, The Arizona Republic, Phoenix.

Critical Inquiry Questions:

1. In Tazewell County, Ill., teen deaths went from 15 in 15 months to 0 for six months which they contribute to a program called Project Ignition. Why does a message from teens to other teens have more impact than a message coming from adults?
2. In 2006, 3,490 drivers age 15-20 died in car crashes. What changes could be implemented to decrease teen auto deaths?
3. How often do you think those who drink and drive do so: never? Once a year? Once a month? More? Why do you think they drink and drive? What can be done to change that?
4. What is the impact of drunk driving on drivers who don't get caught? What is the impact on drunk drivers who do get caught? What is the impact on those who survive alcohol/drug-related crashes? What is the impact of those whose loved ones are killed in alcohol/drug-related crashes?
5. Do you think Desiree Olsen had driven drunk before? Or do you think this might have been her first time? If you were her, how would you feel about your decision to drink and drive Before the accident? After? Would this result change your future drinking and driving behavior?
6. The leading cause of death for teens in the USA is automobile crashes. In Illinois, teen deaths dropped from 155 (2007) to 92 (2008). Is this a significant drop? What contributed to it? What else should be done? What features of other states' programs could they utilize to further decrease road fatalities?
7. What behaviors in these articles increase the likelihood of a fatal accident occurring? Which of these behaviors have you engaged in? Have you been a passenger in a car where the driver was engaging in these behaviors? Have these experiences modified your driving behaviors? If so, how?

Future Implication Questions:

1. As one who is or will be a teen driver, you may have already sat through hours of drivers' education instruction. What techniques did they use to teach you? (i.e. reading articles, taking quizzes, etc.) Were these techniques effective? What do you remember most from drivers' ed. training? Why did these things stick in your mind? Write a paragraph on how drivers' ed. training could be changed to help you remember more of the information.
2. Using information from these articles, developing six interview questions that you can ask to gain a local perspective on this issue. Then, interview a person involved in local law enforcement like the sheriff or a student who is involved in Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) at your school.
3. Project Ignition at Stephen Arends' high school put together some commercials to encourage students to follow some guidelines while driving. Watch one short video at a time and then answer these two questions: What behaviors by the teen driver led up to the climactic event at the end of each video? What changes in behavior could have changed the outcome of the story?
 - ▶ Project Ignition—Brother <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjAVD7kLyd8>
 - ▶ Project Ignition—Spirit http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxoQV4Nb_Eg
4. Now that you've seen these public service announcements, do you feel they are effective? Why or why not? Does it make a difference to you to know these students probably knew Greg before he was killed and see Stephen around town in his rehabilitated condition? Will having seen these videos impact how you drive? Why or why not?

Graphic Organizer:

Introduction: Rob Foss, a spokesman for the American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association, believes that “driver’s education in this country is antiquated.” The current model for many drivers’ education classes is 30 hours in the classroom and six hours of behind-the-wheel driving instruction. Foss also infers that some courses being used now were designed 60 years ago.

Directions: Imagine that you have been chosen as a task force member to update driver’s education classes for your state. Using the grid below, fill in the details of what you think needs to be changed or updated about drivers’ education.

Questions to consider:	Your answer:	Your reasons/justifications for your answer:
What in-car distractions do drivers now deal with that should be addressed?		
What new technologies should be implemented in teaching drivers’ ed?		
What techniques (beyond lecture) could be used to assist the learning process (ride-alongs, guest speakers, case studies, etc.)		

Links to Additional Research:

www.keepthedrive.com

Keep the Drive (from AllState Foundation)

www.Teendriving.com

Promotes safe driving for teens and new drivers and is the number one ranked teen driving site on the web. Started by a teen and his mom in 1994.

www.rmiiia.org/Auto/Teens/Teen_Driving_Statistics.htm

National Teen Driving Statistics

www.teedriver.nsc.org/

National Safety Council's Teen Driver

www.centersofexcellence.org/teen-driving-safety/articles

AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, Centers of Excellence - Articles on Teen Driving Safety