

**ANDERSON, S.C.** -- As the new school year approaches, Wren High School officials and parents hope to stop a terrible trend. At least 20 teenagers from Wren High School in Anderson County have died in car crashes in almost 20 years.

Just last month, a 16-year-old rising junior was killed.

During an open house at the school on Thursday, parents and students learned about a program that may save lives.

The program is called "Alive at 25." It's endorsed by the South Carolina Council on Safety as a way to reduce and even eliminate traffic deaths.

"You never reach a point where it's not an absolute tragedy in a school when a student dies in a fatal car accident," said Wren High School principal Robbie Binnicker.

Soon, another name will join this list of 57 currently on the school's memorial wall.

"The majority of the students that are on this wall in the 1990s and the first decade of 2000 is certainly due to car accidents," Binnicker said.

Robert Austin McCollum is the latest Wren student to die in a traffic accident.

He was killed in a car wreck in July in Oconee County.

Investigators said they believe the 16-year-old was driving too fast, wasn't wearing a seat belt and was thrown from the vehicle.

Binnicker said he doesn't believe the area is cursed, but the turns in the roads make them very dangerous.

"There are lots of roads that have no shoulders that are very curvy windy and they are places right next to the interstate where students can go 65 mph very safely," he said. "They get off the interstate off to these farm roads and, for very inexperienced

drivers, they think they can drive 65 mph on those roads, as well, and that just cant happen."

The "Alive at 25" program will teach young drivers life-saving techniques.

"There's peer pressure in the car," said parent Julie Wilson. "It's important for the driver to understand that it's their responsibility not only make sure the kids in the front are buckled but the kids in the back are buckled."

Binnicker said that speed and not wearing seat belts were the main contributing factors in most of the students' deaths.

Binnicker and Wilson believe the Wren community can pull together to keep their young people from dying too soon.

"On the eve of Austin's funeral I told my husband at that time that Austin would be the last. We had to do something as a community."said Wilson.

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