

http://www2.scnow.com/news/2011/apr/25/school-district-launches-alive-25-safe-driving-pro-ar-1760496/



Published: April 25, 2011

[Home](#) / [news](#) /

School district launches 'Alive at 25' safe driving program

By **Jim Faile**

More teens die in the U.S. from traffic crashes than from any other cause, according to the National Safety Council.

On Thursday, officials with the Darlington County School District, the Darlington County Sheriff's Office and other local law enforcement agencies and the South Carolina National Safety Council launched a new program in Darlington County's public schools designed to help teenagers develop safe driving practices and keep them alive on the highways.

Alive at 25 is a survival course developed by the National Safety Council that is designed to prevent fatal crashes involving teens by focusing on good driving practices. While drivers education courses focus on the mechanics of driving, "Alive at 25" focuses on the behaviors of teen drivers, said Brooke Russell, executive director and chief operating officer of South Carolina National Safety Council.

"We commend you for taking such a proactive approach to educating your young adults to be alive at 25," Russell said. "Leadership like this sets the example for the state of South Carolina."

The course seeks to help participants recognize that their inexperience and casual attitudes toward driving can cause violations, collisions, injuries and death, Russell said. Unlike driver education courses, the course focuses on classroom discussions led by law enforcement officers rather than on behind-the-wheel driving. Students have the opportunity to discuss their attitudes and feelings related to such topics as peer pressure, intentional risk taking, hazard recognition, cell phone use and texting while driving and accepting responsibility the choices they make while driving, she said.

Russell stressed that the course is not a substitute for or alternative to driver's education courses. "We really believe students should take both," she said.

The four and a half hour course will be offered to students at Hartsville, Darlington and Lamar high schools and at Mayo High School for Math, Science and Technology on a voluntary basis, but students at the

Darlington County Institute for Technology (DCIT) who want to drive to that school will be required to take the course, said DCIT Director Bert Guerry. Those DCIT students who opt not to take the course will not be granted on-campus parking privileges, Guerry said.

The DCIT serves students from all of the other four schools, and some of those who drive to the DCIT from their home school, from Hartsville and Lamar in particular, travel greater distances and spend more time on the road between schools than they do traveling from their homes to the home schools, Guerry said.

“We like to practice shop safety and safety rules and all of those things in our schools, and we want to make that safety factor extend outside of those parameters in their driving from the high school to our school,” he said.

“It’s not so much that it’s going to teach you how to drive,” Guerry said, “It’s going to teach you to think about driving and how to think about things that maybe you’re doing that aren’t safe to do.”

Guerry said the program will initially be offered in July and August before school registration. “The more kids we can get trained and go through this program, the better our safety record will be and the more we can have alive at 25,” he said.

Superintendent of Education Dr. Rainey Knight said that while the program will be voluntary at the other district schools, principals and school officials plan to vigorously encourage students to participate in the program. “I really like the name of the program because it is, literally, we want them alive at 25,” she said.

“We know how quickly things can change in a car as adults when we’re driving, and there are so many distractions now that young people have, and we really want to reduce that,” Knight said.

Knight said the program also points to the strong relationship between the schools and local law enforcement. “They did not blink. They said absolutely, yes, we want to be part of it,” she said.

“One life lost is one too many,” said Capt. Andy Locklair of the Darlington County Sheriff’s Office.

“When we have the opportunity to go out and do proactive law enforcement, we’re all in every time,” Locklair said. “This is a wonderful program. We want it to be a success. Anytime you’re dealing with the youth of a community, it’s always important to, number one, put the focus of keeping people safe, especially our young kids, at the top of that list. When we found out about the ‘Alive at 25’ program, it didn’t take the sheriff long to say, ‘Get some people together, let’s get some training and let’s be a part of this.’ Anything we can do to further the betterment of our community, we’re in for.”

School officials also plan to encourage parents to participate, she said. Russell said her organization also encourages parental participation. “We love parents,” she said.

Russell said parents may also be able to get a break on their children’s auto insurance costs by ensuring that their young people participate.

The cost of the course is \$35. Russell stressed that for students who want to take the course but cannot afford the cost, full scholarship funding is available through her organization with support from the All State Foundation. Russell said scholarship information is available at www.scaliveat25.org or by calling (803) 732-6778.

Russell said 36,000 South Carolina high school students have completed the program since 2007, when the program was first introduced in the state. Since then, the state has seen a 38 percent reduction in traffic fatalities among 15 to 24-year-olds, she said.

Statewide, 64 high schools currently offer the program and 37 make it mandatory for students who want to drive to school to get campus parking privileges,

SCNOW © Copyright 2011 Media General Communications Holdings, LLC. A Media General company.