

Great Brook School to host distracted driving talk

Film produced by pro race car driver Andy Pilgrim will lead Wednesday night's discussion, run by driver's ed teacher Earl Russell

By Lindsey Arceci
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ANTRIM — Seventy-one percent of teens admit to composing or sending a text message while driving, according to the official U.S. Government website for distracted driving. In an effort to help deter young drivers from distractive driving habits, Great Brook Middle School will host “The Parent Driving Zone,” a presentation for parents to influence safe driving practices while driving with children, on Wednesday night.

Regardless of what a sixteen-year-old learns in a driving education class, 70 to 75 percent of this driving population will follow what their parents do, local driving education teacher Earl Russell said in an interview on Monday. With 14 years of experience as a driving instructor out of Weare, Russell learned that “the students will follow what [driving instructors] are doing when we’re in the car, but they will model their parents when they’re on their own.”

From his experience as a driving instructor with high school students, Russell said that parents who approached him on this topic would say, “I wish I knew this information sooner.” In 2011, Russell started teaching industrial technology at GBS. With this new access to a younger parent population, Russell reached out to the GBS Parent-Teacher Organization and the Antrim Police Department to inform parents about distractive habits. Russell will speak at the event along with a screening of a film by British race car driver Andy Pilgrim.

Distractive behaviors while driving include texting, eating and drinking and using a navigation system, just to name a few, Russell said. Because text messaging requires visual, manual and cognitive attention from the driver, it is by far the most alarming distraction. “At least when children are in the car, don’t engage in distractive activities, put away the cell phones,” Russell said.

Russell admits that adults know when not to engage in these behaviors but only because they have years of experience to fall back on. “I want to save lives,” Russell said, regarding his reason for cultivating this event.

All middle school parents and students within the ConVal district are invited to attend the presentation Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. at the GBS cafeteria.