



Contact:
Michael VanKeulen
(888) 856-7026
mvankeulen@nylc.org

Teens celebrate as Indiana's texting ban goes into effect today

Project Ignition students emerging as eager and effective supporters of safe driving legislation

ST. PAUL, Minn. (July 1, 2011) – Legislators in favor of stronger safe driving laws are finding great backing among what might seem like an unlikely crowd – teen drivers. While popular opinion might be that this group would be in opposition, the reality is that through a program called Project Ignition, young people are learning that in order to change driving behaviors, stronger legislation is a critical strategy in which they can play a role.

Coordinated by the National Youth Leadership Council® and sponsored by State Farm®, [Project Ignition](#) is a grant program that utilizes service-learning to address teen driver safety issues through student-led campaigns. For seven years, students in public schools throughout the United States and Canada have been meeting academic objectives while working vehemently to change behaviors and save lives on the road.

Students have found great success in partnering with their local legislators for stronger legislation around texting and graduated drivers licensing. Faith Mock, Project Ignition advisor and teacher at Rushville Consolidated High School in Rushville, Ind., explained how that evolved in their community. “In July 2010, Indiana passed a law that made texting and driving illegal for anyone under the age of 18 years. In as much as we supported this law we knew that the law needed to include every age. In our community we believe that as many or more adults are texting than our teen drivers,” she said.

Rushville’s Project Ignition students worked to influence the new law in effect today, July 1, which bans texting and driving for all ages. Students rallied at the Indiana State Capitol in November, 2010. They spoke to members of the media and state legislators about the dangers of texting and driving for all ages, coming together with others to inspire a very successful media campaign by WISH TV 8. Project Ignition students wrote letters and designed posters on display at the Capitol.

And today, as the law goes into effect, Rushville’s Project Ignition students are demonstrating their support in another very visual way. In partnership with the Rushville Police Department, Rush County Fraternal Order of the Police and State Farm agent Dusty Flannery, they created and distributed 100 large lawn signs and an eight-foot banner that say “STOP Texting and Driving, Put Down the Phone, It’s Indiana Law.”

This trend is not just being seen in Indiana – students throughout the United States are influencing state legislation through Project Ignition.

- Gibson City-Melvin-Sibley High School students have actively worked in support of Illinois’ stronger graduated drivers licensing laws, cellular phone ban in school zones and road construction areas and texting ban. In addition, they partnered with the group Families Against Chronic Excessive Speed to increase speeding fines and change the classifications of certain speeding tickets to be more serious offenses.
- Students at Ionia County Intermediate School District in Ionia, Mich. were involved in the state’s enhanced graduated drivers licensing law that took effect March 30. They rallied support, were present at the signing, and perhaps most importantly, have been a critical force in educating their peers statewide about the impact and benefits of stronger restrictions.
- In Arizona, Payson High School’s Project Ignition students have been meeting with legislators regarding Senate Bill 1538, which would ban texting while driving at any age. They wrote a position paper and formed a core group of students who are committed to moving the legislation forward.



“Project Ignition believes that the kind of youth leadership being demonstrated in Indiana today, and in communities throughout the United States and Canada, is a critical component to effectively changing driving behaviors and saving lives,” said Michael VanKeulen, Project Ignition National Program Director. “These young people are informed, active and in a uniquely influential position. They are turning the tables on stereotypes and proving that young people will no longer tolerate unsafe driving practices in their communities.”

For more information about how to bring Project Ignition to your school and community, visit www.sfprojectignition.com, www.facebook.com/projectignition or contact Natalie Waters Seum, on behalf of the National Youth Leadership Council, at n.watersseum@gmail.com or 651-485-1597.

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Source: National Youth Leadership Council

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