

Help Make “Every 15 Minutes” a Success at Magruder

Every 15 Minutes is a powerful and effective program that reaches teenagers about the preventable tragedies that can result from the decision to drink and drive.

It has been more than 10 years since Every 15 Minutes was held at Magruder. Mr. Evans reserved April 30 – May 1 on the school calendar so we can hold the event in its entirety. Over the summer, a committee was formed to address the many facets of the program that need to be coordinated so our upperclassmen can benefit from its lessons about being a responsible driver. Read on to learn more about the program and how you can help.

What is Every 15 Minutes?

Every 15 Minutes is a 2-day program for high school juniors and seniors. The name comes from the statistic when the program began about 20 years ago: Every 15 minutes, someone in the United States dies from an alcohol-related vehicular accident. Today the statistic is almost every 30 minutes. This, of course, is still unacceptable, but the frequency of deaths will continue to decline as more teenagers truly understand the risks involved with driving while intoxicated.

What Happens During an Every 15 Minutes Program?

Students who qualify can volunteer to be called out of their class by the “Grim Reaper” at an unknown time, one every 15 minutes throughout the school day. The student has make-up applied to look dead and finishes out her school day without her cell phone or speaking to anyone. After the student is called out of the classroom, a police officer steps in to read the student’s “obituary,” which was written by the student’s parents. The obituaries are posted on a board in a main hallway for all to see as the day goes on.

At lunch, an announcement is made over the PA system that an accident has occurred involving students, and that 911 has been called. Juniors and Seniors go out to a designated spot on the school grounds for a staged accident. Several things happen simultaneously. A “dead” pedestrian student in front of the car is assessed by EMTs, placed on a stretcher, covered entirely with a blanket, and brought over to the where the crowd of students is watching. The Grim Reaper stands over the student’s body.

The “drunk” student driver is tested by two police officers, hand-cuffed, and placed in their squad car. Fire rescue workers use the Jaws of Life to take the car apart and remove the front passenger, who is slumped over the dashboard and looking barely alive. (This student will “die” at Shady Grove Hospital ER, and the ER doctor will explain what has happened to his parents, who have volunteered to participate in this role.) The two rear passengers are treated for minor injuries.

When the rescue workers have done everything they can, the students witnessing the accident return to class. The “living dead” students (those pulled out of class, and those who participated in the accident) finish out their school day in silence.

At the end of the school day, the “living dead” students go to Pumphrey’s Funeral Home to pick out their casket and listen to a talk by the director.

From there they go to an overnight retreat to hear speakers talk about their experience with a DWI accident, including parents who have lost children as a result, a woman who became paralyzed, and a Magruder 2003 graduate who was responsible for the death of his teenage passenger because of his decision to drink and drive. The students also write an essay about how being a living dead student affected them and their family and friends.

The second day of the program, all the juniors and seniors attend a 2-hour assembly, in which they watch video of the staged accident, but with added scenes, including what led to the accident. Speakers can include the parent of a “living dead” student, program sponsors, and local government officials. Then the “living dead” students read their essays. This is an especially emotional and powerful piece for everyone present.

The assembly is the official end of the program, but there can be a luncheon for student, parent, staff and sponsor participants to recognize their support.

How Can I Learn More?

YouTube videos of Walt Whitman High School’s experience with Every 15 Minutes are available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDmBqzJs9QQ>

The official website for this national program is Every15Minutes.com

How Can I Help The Program Succeed at Magruder HS?

As the school year progresses, there will be many jobs to pull all the pieces together. Most of these jobs are simple and short term, such as making phone calls from your home.

If you would like to help, or just want more information, please contact Megan Griffin, Class of 2009, at megs_0519@yahoo.com, or Patty Winters, Magruder HS PTSA Vice President In Charge Of Programs, at 301-519-7537 or patty.winters@verizon.net.