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Safer teen driving is goal of new education initiative

NJSIAA and NJ Teen Safe Driving Coalition team up

ROBBINSVILLE, NJ (October 17, 2011) – A new, first-in-the-nation education initiative designed to help high school coaches make student athletes aware of the New Jersey Graduated Driver License (GDL) program has been unveiled by the NJSIAA (New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association) and the NJ Teen Safe Driving Coalition. The New Jersey GDL program, which took effect on January 1, 2001, is a three-step licensing system that helps new drivers gain behind-the-wheel experience before becoming fully licensed. The steps consist of the learner's permit, the probationary license, and the basic or unrestricted license.

The two organizations are distributing a pamphlet, "A Game Plan for Talking to Your Student Athletes About New Jersey's Graduated Driver License Program," to athletic directors and coaches across the state in an effort to help them educate their student athletes about the proven principles of the GDL program. Along with information and statistics about how and why the GDL works to reduce teen crash risk, the pamphlet also includes a sample student athlete code of conduct that athletic directors and coaches may choose to use.

"It's our responsibility to help athletic directors and coaches protect student athletes by promoting initiatives aimed at keeping these kids safe," says NJSIAA Executive Director Steve Timko. "We believe making the announcement at the start of National Teen Safe Driving Week is the ideal way to get everyone on board."

The crucial need for the GDL program was illustrated in tragic fashion this August, when four football players from Linwood's Mainland Regional High School died in a car crash on the Garden State Parkway. Four other players were injured. Had the GDL provisions – which allow the teen driver to have only one passenger in the vehicle – been followed, this deadly crash may have been prevented.

"The leading cause of teen crashes in New Jersey is distraction and inattention, which is prompted not just by the use of cell phones and texting, but other passengers," adds Pam Fischer, Leader of the NJ Teen Safe Driving Coalition and the mother of a high school student athlete. "The provisions of the GDL program address those things that cause the greatest risk for teens and that has helped drive teen crashes, injuries and fatalities in our state to record lows. But it's important that athletic directors and coaches know the facts and can share them with their athletes so that they not only have a winning season, but a safe one."

The GDL "game plan" pamphlet can be downloaded from the NJSIAA website at www.njsiaa.org.

About the NJSIAA

Established in 1918, the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletics Association (NJSIAA) is a voluntary, non-profit organization comprised of 433 accredited public, private, and parochial high schools. A member of the National Federation of State High School Associations, the NJSIAA conducts tournaments and crowns champions in 32 sports. Championship competition for girls is sponsored in basketball, bowling, cross country, fencing, field hockey, golf, gymnastics, lacrosse, soccer, softball, swimming, tennis, outdoor track, winter track, and volleyball. Boys' championships are determined in baseball, basketball, bowling, cross country, fencing, football, golf, ice hockey, lacrosse, soccer, swimming, tennis, outdoor track, winter track, volleyball, and wrestling.

About the NJ Teen Safe Driving Coalition

Established in 2010, through a grant from The Allstate Foundation in partnership with the National Safety Council, the New Jersey Teen Safe Driving Coalition is composed of more than 50 individuals and organizations who volunteer their time and resources to help teens and parents leverage the proven principles of Graduated Driver Licensing. The Coalition also works with law enforcement and school officials to deliver outreach, education and training programs that encourage, educate and engage communities to help teens become good drivers for life.

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