Recognizing distracted driving is a major concern among teenage drivers, HHS students Ben Martinez, Molly Brandt and Jacob Vasa are doing something about it.

“X the Text: You’re not Superman, you know” is a student-led project focused on the dangers of texting while driving.

“Pretty much everyone has a cell phone,” said Brandt. “It’s a bigger distraction than drinking and driving.”

Brandt and Martinez, along with Erin Vieselmeyer, conducted the “Every 15 Minutes” project last year for their Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) Chapter Service Project Display.

This drunk driving prevention program earned them a spot at the National Organizations for Youth Safety’s (NOYS) 2011 National Teen Distracted Driving Summit. Vasa, along with FCCLA advisor Karen Pieper, joined the team at the October summit in Washington, D.C.

The NOYS summit opened their eyes to the dangers of texting and driving. They learned drivers are 23 times more likely to crash if texting, and driving time reaction is the equivalent of drinking four beers. For five seconds of taking one’s eye off the road, traveling 55 m.p.h., one can travel a distance of four football fields.

After returning from the summit last fall, Martinez, Brandt and Vasa made plans to hold their own “X the Text” summits as part of their FCCLA Chapter Service Project Manual.

Local statistics from Holyoke High School students report 78 percent of kids think texting and driving is an issue. Ninety-one percent don’t think it’s worth the risk to text and drive, yet 68 percent admit to texting while driving.

Close to 40 percent text and drive on a regular basis, with 33 percent of students having the mindset that they can text and drive without consequences.

With these startling statistics in mind, the FCCLA students launched their first summit at Holyoke High School last week.

The team kicked off the week with a presentation to the freshman and sophomore students on Monday, Feb. 27. The time was kept very interactive as the students got a hands-on experience to see just how hard it is to multitask—texting on a cell phone while attempting to do other activities at the same time.

FCCLA members Molly Brandt, Jacob Vasa and Ben Martinez present "X the Text: You're not Superman, you know" at the local distracted driving summit.—Enterprise photo

Team members said their focus with the underclassmen was to prevent them from starting the habit of texting and driving, since most of the students don't have their licenses yet.

Tuesday, the group worked with the juniors while the seniors attended the summit on Wednesday. These presentations focused on the facts and the consequences of texting and driving.

Four thousand teens die every year from car crashes, and the biggest percentage of distracted drivers are under the age of 20.

Team members asked them, “How many car crashes are preventable?” and “Why do you risk it?”

“Their actions are naive, and they don’t think about what they’re doing,” said Martinez.

The team hopes by giving the students the knowledge about texting and driving, they can use that to make their own choices about distracted driving.

They also highlighted the three types of distracted driving, something they call “The Triple Whammy.” Visual is taking one’s eyes off the road, manual is taking one’s hands off the wheel and cognitive is taking one’s mind off driving.

Texting while driving includes all three types of distractions, said Brandt.

The local summit also included AT&T’s powerful documentary “The Last Text.”

Monday, March 5, all high school students gathered for the final session of the summit. Team members focused on the solution to the problem, giving the teens practical ways to stay away from texting and driving. They presented them with useful cell phone applications as well as information from Phillips County Undersheriff Thom Elliott.

This spring, Holyoke’s “X the Text” summit will be presented in two student-led workshops at the FCCLA State Leadership Conference.

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