

Driving distractions: Prouty students learn to focus at the wheel

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SPENCER - Almost every student who was distracted by a cellphone, a water bottle or even the car radio ended up with a shattered windshield during their turn in a driving simulator.

"One of the kids was really frightened by it," David Prouty High School Principal Elizabeth York said. "I was happy that it had such an impact."

At the school last week, students with learners' permits and those licensed less than a year had the opportunity to use the driving simulator - a close-to-real test of driving skills.

Nick Prpich, the tour manager of Distractology, a distracted-driving education program, travels to schools around New England with a trailer that houses two simulators. He urges students to use their cellphone, take a sip from a water bottle or turn on the radio - all in an effort to show how the distractions can impact their driving. Sometimes, even without a distraction, other drivers cut them off.

"Drivers who've completed Distractology are proven to be 19 percent less likely to have major/minor accidents and 25 percent less likely to get traffic violations," according to [Distractology.com](#).

The McGrath Insurance Co. in Sturbridge was selected by the Arbella Insurance Foundation to host the Distractology program at David Prouty. Arbella sponsors the program.

About 100 David Prouty students were registered to participate and each received a \$15 gas card for completing the training.

TOP DISTRACTIONS:

1. **Cellphones:** Texting, talking, tweeting and even taking selfies from behind the wheel, young drivers are taking a risk every time they reach for the phone.
2. **Radio:** Changing the station, swapping a CD or just turning the radio on can cause a driver to look away from the road long enough to miss a hazard.
3. **Eating/drinking:** Any time a driver's hands aren't on the wheel there's an increased chance for trouble.
4. **Passengers:** Don't let friends be a distraction while driving. It's your job to keep them safe.