

By Carolyn Lee The Imperial Republican

Members of Chase County Schools' (CCS) Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) organization have geared up their promotion of teen driver safety, using Teens in the Driver Seat.

That's a new traffic safety education program designed by the state to help teens become safe drivers and keep everyone safer on the roads.

CCS is one of seven schools in Nebraska using the program. FCCLA Advisor Cathy Hanna applied for the program, which started with a "no texting" campaign last fall.

She said Teens in the Driver Seat ties in with another program FCCLA promotes. Also, "Any time you see auto accidents and lives cut short, it reaffirms we needed to keep safe driving awareness in there," she commented.

The Department of Health and Human Services said the advantage of Teens in the Driver Seat is that it uses peer-to-peer influence to bring together young drivers, parents, school administrators, communities and other partners to reduce teen crashes on Nebraska roadways.

The program addresses both awareness and behavior, using peer pressure as a positive force to promote safe driving habits.

In January, FCCLA held an assembly and showed a video concerning safe driving. Free pencils and shirts were handed out and a survey was conducted.

The results of that survey aren't back from the state yet, Hanna said. A follow-up assessment will be given at a later date, to see how the program has influenced teen driving.

In February, FCCLA members passed out valentines with safe driving reminders, and in March, green beads were handed out for St. Patrick's Day.

Hanna is hoping the Nebraska State Patrol will bring its rollover and seat belt simulators to the school in April.

In May, students will be part of a traffic stop before school, where Smarties will be handed out to safe drivers and DumDums will be given to those not showing driving smarts.

Teens in the Driver Seat addresses the top five risks for teen drivers: nighttime driving, speeding, distractions, low seat belt use and alcohol.

Hanna said the state doesn't provide funding for the program, but does give promotional items and resources.

According to the Nebraska Crash Outcome Data Evaluation System, teens are dying in motor vehicle crashes at three times the rate of the average adult. From 2007-11, 122 teens, ages 14-19, died in motor vehicle crashes in Nebraska. During that same period 13,930 injuries occurred, many of which were debilitating, costly and largely preventable.