

**Kids Speaking Up for Road Safety** is a one-time 30-45 minute in-school lesson for grades 2 through 6 that aims to keep children, drivers, passengers, pedestrians, and cyclists safe through thoughtful education. There are three objectives. The first objective is to educate children about the activities in which drivers engage that can cause the drivers to be distracted and the consequences of those distracting activities. The second objective is to help the children learn how to be safe passengers, in this case passengers that do not distract the driver. The third objective is to empower children to speak up effectively when they feel unsafe in a vehicle because the driver is engaging in distracting activities. Because the way in which children speak to their parents about distracting activities has been shown to reduce such activities when the children are teens, it is reasonable to think that this same way of speaking to parents by elementary school children will motivate their parents and other caregivers to change their behavior when it comes to distracted driving activities. While the children in our program won't be driving for another 4-10 years, by speaking up as passengers, they are keeping themselves safe, as well as others in the car and on the road around them.

Crashes are the 2nd leading cause of unintentional death for young people between 4 and 24 in the United States. Distracted driving is a factor in approximately 25% of all crash fatalities. Teaching children about distracted driving at a young age will reach adult family members and positively impact the community. We want children in the backseat to be safe and be ambassadors for safe, focused driving.

The content in our lesson is modeled after successful anti-smoking campaigns, seat belt campaigns, and recycling efforts. These efforts reach the parent through positive messages from their children rather than a 'wagging the finger' approach. The program is designed to be fun and interactive, tying in core Social Emotional Learning competencies such as Responsible Decision-Making and Self-Awareness.

The lesson is divided into 3 main areas: 1. Talk to students about the concept of distraction, multi-tasking, and how it can affect us and our lives. 2. Introduce the idea of speaking up when you see something that makes you feel scared or worried. We teach a model we call SAM: See a problem, Address the problem using an I-statement, Make an action plan together. This non-confrontational bystander intervention language has been used in several areas of education, and is shown to be an effective behavior-change tool. 3. Tie everything together and practice using the I-statement language in different scenarios, including a car being driven by their parent, caregiver, or another adult.

Safe Roads Alliance has offered this pilot program in 2 school communities in the 2021-2022 school year, and they plan to bring the Kids Speaking Up for Road Safety program to an additional 4 school districts and 2 after school programs in the 2022-2023 school year.

Last year, Methuen Public Schools taught the Kids Speaking Up for Road Safety program to all students in grades 2-4. It was taught by a team of Wellness teachers, and they had mostly 3rd and 4th grade students fill out pre and post surveys. There were a total of 14 questions, and we received a total of 389 pre-lesson surveys and 296 post-lesson surveys. We were particularly looking at the answers to 2 questions on the pre-lesson and post-lesson survey:

1. "Do you think you know the right words to use to ask your driver to stop talking on the phone while driving?"
  - a. I don't know any of the right words to use
  - b. I know some of the right words to use
  - c. I know most of the right words to use
  - d. I know all of the right words to use

<sup>1</sup> D. L. Fisher, A. Byrne, C. Calabrese, A. Lehrer and M. & Petrella, "Reducing Distracted Driving Among Adults: Child-to-Adult Interventions (DOT HS 813 328)," National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Washington, DC, 2022

2. "What is the best way to get the driver to stop driving while distracted?"
  - a. Tell them about the dangers of not paying attention to the road
  - b. Tell them you are worried about a crash
  - c. Tell them to pay attention to the road

The results for Question 1 and Question 2 above suggest that the program is having exactly the effect that you/we would hope! There was a 250% increase in the number of students who knew which words to say to their parents (Q2) and an 89% increase in the percentage of students who believed they knew the right words to use (Q2) (Figure 1). Note that the percentage who used the right words (35%, Q2) and the percentage who believed they knew what words to use (34%, Q1) on the post-lesson survey were nearly identical. The difference comes in the baseline (pre-lesson) percentage. While fully 18% believed that they knew the right words to use on the pre-lesson survey (Q1), only 10% actually chose the right words on the pre-lesson survey (Q2).

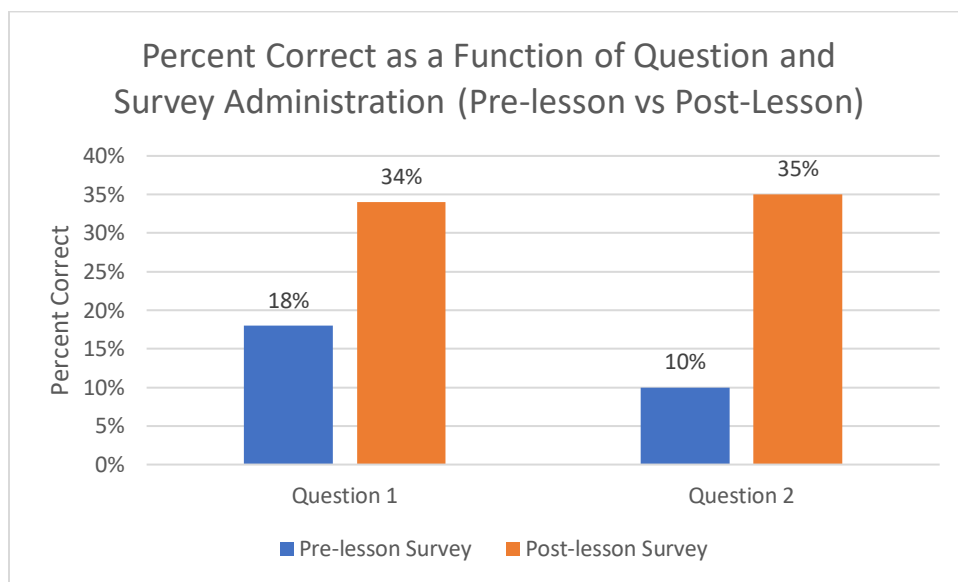


Figure 1.

The differences in the pre-lesson and post-lesson surveys on both Question 1 and Question 2 were statistically significant using a simple t-test ( $p = 0.03$  and  $p = 0.01$ ). In laypersons' terms, this means that the likelihood that the pre-lesson and post-lesson sample percentages actually came from the same underlying distribution would be true, respectively, only 3 out of 100 and 1 out of 100 times the students were given the same lesson, pre-lesson survey, and post-lesson survey.

Additionally, it is important to note that in the similar lesson given to teens and mentioned above<sup>Error!</sup>  
 Bookmark not defined. , the percentage improvement of the teens on Questions 1 and 2 was, respectively, 165% and 244%. This is important to note because in that survey teens were asked how often their parents and friends were to drive distracted both before and after the lesson. A decrease in distracted driver activity was present for parents and friends (and the decrease was statistically significant). Thus, based on the similarities among this lesson and the lesson given to teens one can expect the frequency with which parents and caregivers engage in distracted driving activities to decrease after the Kids Speaking Up for Road Safety program.