



*Improving the Quality of Life  
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**University Transportation Center for Mobility™**

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# Activating Teens to Prevent Traffic Crashes

## *Final Report*

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16. Abstract Car crashes kill more young people each year than any other cause. In addition to law enforcement and driver education, efforts to improve safety for this age group over the years have included public education and outreach programs, but these programs have suffered from two notable shortcomings. First, they have tended to focus exclusively on drunk driving, largely overlooking dangers that are actually more common to teenage drivers, such as nighttime driving and distractions (mainly cell phones/texting and other teen passengers). Second, the programs have typically been developed by adults with little or no involvement by the target audience, thereby limiting their potential effectiveness. Teens in the Driver Seat® (TDS) is a growing program that addresses each of these issues by focusing on many of the common teen driver dangers and by involving teens in both the development and delivery of safety messages. This essential teen involvement takes many forms, one of the most important of which is the TDS Teen Advisory Board, a representative group of teens from across Texas who offer ongoing guidance and feedback to Texas Transportation Institute staff who are responsible for the TDS program. The activities described in this report have enhanced the substance and value of this teen feedback by bringing the board's members together once each quarter for extensive, interactive involvement in the ongoing refinement and growth of the TDS program. Since the launch of TDS in 2003, the frequency and rate of teen drivers involved in fatal crashes has fallen faster and more steadily in Texas than in any other state, a distinction due in part to how TDS peer messaging augments and supports the state's graduated driver license law. This increased teen involvement in TDS has helped to ensure continued success of the program.			
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# Activating Teens to Prevent Traffic Crashes

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Final Report

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Project Title: “Activating Teens to Prevent Traffic Crashes,  
the Leading Cause of Death and Injury for America's Youth”

Sponsored by:

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## **Executive Summary**

Car crashes kill more young people than any other cause, accounting for nearly half of all teen deaths in America each year. Over 3,000 U.S. teens die each year in car crashes, and for each teen killed in a car crash, about 100 more are injured. Every 15 minutes, another teen becomes a statistic. In 2002, in response to the need to get teenagers more involved in solutions to address the teen driver safety problem, the Texas Transportation Institute embarked on the creation of a peer-to-peer safety education-outreach program now known as Teens in the Driver Seat® (TDS).

Since 2009, TDS has asked high school students to come forward as safety advocates in their community; this has included filling the role of teen advisors for the program. Teens who are in the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades, between the ages of 14 and 18, and currently enrolled in school are encouraged to apply for the TDS Teen Advisory Board (TAB). Funding from the University Transportation Center for Mobility™ has provided support for this group, and this report documents the TAB's activities over the past two years.



## **Problem**

Car crashes kill more young people than any other cause, accounting for nearly half of all teen deaths in America each year. Over 3,000 U.S. teens die each year in car crashes, and for each teen killed in a car crash, about 100 more are injured. Every 15 minutes, another teen becomes a statistic.

Efforts to fight this problem have historically included structured education before licensing, graduated licensing laws, and public education after licensing, but many programs to date have notable shortcomings. First, they have not typically focused on all the common dangers teens face behind the wheel—nighttime driving, speeding, distractions (such as cell phones and other teen passengers), low seat belt use, and alcohol use. Second, many programs are developed and delivered by adults with little or no involvement by the target audience, thereby limiting the message and program effectiveness.

## **Approach**

In 2002, in response to the need to get teenagers more involved in solutions to address the teen driver safety problem, the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) embarked on the creation of a peer-to-peer safety education-outreach program now known as Teens in the Driver Seat® (TDS). Since deployment of the program began, the frequency and rate of teen drivers involved in fatal crashes has fallen faster and more steadily in Texas than in any other state, a distinction due in part to how TDS peer messaging augments and supports the state's graduated driver license (GDL) law at the grassroots level. The program has now been deployed in over 500 high schools and reached over 500,000 teens in Texas. Program implementation now also includes five other states, namely California, Connecticut, Georgia, Montana, and North Carolina. The program includes components designed to activate young people at the middle school (i.e., junior high), high school, and college levels, all in a peer-to-peer fashion.

Success of the TDS program comes by involving youth in both the development and delivery of safety messages in their schools/communities. This essential participation takes many forms, one of the most important of which is the TDS Teen Advisory Board (TAB). The TAB was formed in 2009 and is a representative group of teens from across Texas who offer ongoing guidance and feedback in the development of messaging, educational materials, and ideas to the Texas Transportation Institute staff (who are responsible for the TDS program technical support and management). Funding provided through the University Transportation Centers for Mobility (UTCM) was specifically used to further develop and refine the productive role of this advisory board to help ensure sustained viability and quality of the program in the future. The funding was also utilized to help bring these young safety ambassadors together, both in person and through phone/video conferencing mechanisms.

## **Methodology**

Since 2009, TDS has asked high school students to come forward as safety advocates in their community; this has included filling the role of teen advisors for the program. Teens who are in the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades, between the ages of 14 and 18, and currently enrolled in school are encouraged to apply for the TAB. Applicants must be willing to commit to meetings by conference call, video conferencing, or in person, as well as respond quickly to email communication and be able to serve at least one school year. Previous board members are welcome to reapply each year while eligible.

### ***2009–2010 Teen Advisory Board***

During the first year of the TAB, meetings were held on a monthly basis via telephone conference calling. Members would call into a conference number and participate remotely by discussing agenda items. Meeting materials were distributed via email prior to the meeting. Participation was also allowed through email, where meeting materials were emailed and the member could respond with comments prior to the set meeting in case he or she was not able to participate in real time. This medium could replace attendance during the set conference call time and enabled TAB members to provide feedback and suggestions at their convenience.

Meeting attendance waned greatly during the first year (2009–2010). Attendance went from 67% immediately after nomination announcements to 13% by the end of the board terms. TAB members often commented that the monthly meetings were too frequent and other obligations prevented them from attending so often. Another problem arising was that the amount and weight of agenda items was not enough to keep members actively engaged. Meetings did not normally last long or cover many items, so members did not feel compelled to attend. Overall attendance (via email and conference call) averaged 49.2%, with only 9 of the 15 members attending over half of the meetings. No members attended all meetings.

### ***2010–2011 Teen Advisory Board***

The second year of the TDS Teen Advisory Board marked some noteworthy forward progress. A chief example was the advisory board spearheading an event called TDS Fest. The goal of the event was to bring awareness to the fact that car crashes are the leading cause of injury and death for young people in the United States but to do so in a fun, productive, and informative fashion. The activities associated with TDS Fest can be seen in Figure 1. The event was hosted at Creekview High School in Carrollton, Texas, on March 5, 2011, and featured a special t-shirt designed just for the event (see Figure 2). Fifteen different safety-themed booths and several other activities were included in the event. Two different memorial activities (a balloon release and memorial walk) occurred to allow participants to reflect on those lost to car crashes and reaffirm commitments to helping prevent such tragedies in the future (see Figures 3 and 4).

The event was led by the TDS TAB members (see Figure 5) and included special guests, such as the mayor of Carrollton and a member of the Texas State Legislature that represented the Carrollton area. One of the most popular hands-on activities was the pedal car (see Figure 6). Participants went through the course without any distractions and were timed; they would then take another timed run while having to send and receive text messages without hitting cones (and otherwise veering off course), illustrating the negative impact of distractions on driving. The event ended with a dance that was DJ'ed by a local radio station crew (at no cost). Many meetings and hours/days of effort went into the planning and implementation of this event, which marked the most significant outcome of the TAB as of that time. One of the incentives for TAB members to plan the event was that it was to serve (partially) as a fundraiser to help pay for them to attend a conference in Hawaii scheduled for July 2011 (as described in the next section).

## WHO YOU CAN THANK



PBSJ, an Atkins company  
 Omni Hotels & Resorts  
 12th Man Kick Off Team Foundation  
 DJ Cone

Garland Hawaiian Falls Waterpark  
 SportClips Haircuts  
 Frisco RoughRiders  
 Garland Summer Musicals  
 Red Lobster  
 Panera Bread  
 Texas Roadhouse  
 BJ's Restaurant  
 Whataburger, Chick-fil-A

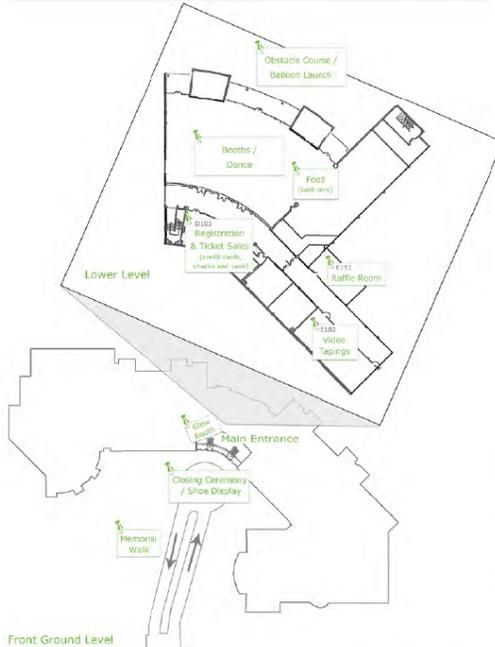
A special thanks to Suzanne Reese of Creekview High School, whose endless support and dedication to Teens in the Driver Seat and her students, helped make TDS Fest a reality! We appreciate you and the support of Creekview High School and the Carrollton-Farmers Branch ISD.



STOMPING the #1 killer of Teens in America!



## WHERE TO BE



STOMPING the #1 killer of Teens in America!

## WHEN TO BE THERE

- 3:00 pm - 8:00 pm Registration Check-in  
Room D103
- 3:00 pm Opening Ceremony  
Cafeteria
- 3:00 pm - 6:15 pm Raffle Ticket Purchase -  
Pick your Prize  
Room E112
- 3:00 pm - 6:15 pm Booths Open  
Cafeteria
- 3:00 pm - 8:00 pm TDS Star Video Tappings  
Room E102/Living Room
- 4:30 pm Balloon Launch  
Outside, Behind Cafeteria
- 6:30 pm Memorial Walk &  
Luminary Display  
Outside, Front Circle Driveway
- 7:00 pm Closing Ceremony &  
Raffle Drawing  
Cafeteria
- 7:15 pm Dance featuring KISS FM DJ  
Cafeteria
- 8:15 pm Announcement of School  
Booth Winners  
Cafeteria
- 8:15 pm Event Ends



Figure 1. TDS Fest Program and Activities



Figure 2. TDS Fest T-Shirt Design



Figure 3. TDS Fest Balloon Release



Figure 4. TDS Fest Memorial Walk



Figure 5. TAB Members Reading the Official Program Pledge to TDS Fest Participants



**Figure 6. TDS Fest Pedal Car on Obstacle Course**

While the first two years were productive in many respects, everyone agreed that the role of the advisory board could be improved. Teens in the Driver Seat staff, therefore, surveyed the TAB members, asking what could be done to increase participation of members. Responses regarding ways to improve the board included:

1. Hold quarterly meetings (instead of monthly).
2. Allow a greater number of members on the board (they liked the idea of meeting many other teens from other regions and networking with them).
3. Identify some strategic initiatives that the TAB could take on.
4. Find additional ways to enhance/enable board member communications between formal meetings.
5. Try to meet in person at least once per year.

In order to keep teens actively engaged while on the board and reapplying each year, and based on the TAB member feedback, TDS staff set out to make positive changes, including:

1. Change the frequency of TAB meetings from monthly to quarterly to increase attendance.
2. Utilize video conferencing in the regional TTI offices (San Antonio, College Station, Dallas, Houston, and El Paso) to bring members together for the meetings, when possible, to increase connectedness.

3. Task the board with a project that could possibly span several board terms and that teens could become excited about and intensely involved in.
4. Continue to allow participation through email in case some members were not able to participate in real time.
5. Provide brief text message updates and meeting reminders.
6. Create probationary and board membership revocation rules for board members who missed meetings and provided no feedback via email.

### ***2011–2012 Teen Advisory Board***

The 2011–2012 Teen Advisory Board consisted of 14 student members from 10 different cities across the state of Texas (Archer City, Bandera, Bronte, Bushland, Carrollton, El Paso, Garland, Houston, Lancaster, and Taft). The board met on a quarterly basis and corresponded during the off months by email and through a public and private blog that was created and managed by TTI/TDS program staff. Photos and first names of members are included below in Figure 7.



**Figure 7. 2011–2012 TDS Teen Advisory Board Members**

TDS TAB members were invited to (and spoke at) the National Student Safety Program (NSSP) 2011 conference in Honolulu, Hawaii, from July 15–18, 2011. Cori Hash and Cassie Henk represented the TDS program and led the teen discussion along with TDS Director, Russell Henk. The TDS Fest shirt won first place in the Best T-Shirt Design Competition during the NSSP event. Activities led by Cori and Cassie at the NSSP meeting included an information booth for the TDS program. While TDS and the TAB were an active part of this event, UTCM funding was not used for related travel expenses (which were covered by TTI and State Farm funds).

TAB members of the 2011–2012 board were also instrumental in developing a new design for the TDS t-shirts, which are provided free (up to 12 shirts per school) to each active TDS school as a part of the program resource kit. This past year, it was decided to move away from the previous t-shirt design, which was based on the statistic of 6,000 teens, on average, dying in car crashes each year in the U.S. (see Figure 8). This previous design had been in use for eight years (since the program’s inception). The new shirt design carries the purpose of the program on the front and the call to action (the official pledge, created by the 2010–2011 board members) on the back (see Figure 9). TDS staff members have received numerous compliments about the new design since its deployment this past school year.



**Figure 8. Original TDS Program T-Shirt Design**



**Figure 9. New (2011–2012) TDS Program T-Shirt Design**

This 2011–2012 advisory board helped improve communication by suggesting the need for a blog and private webpage dedicated to the TAB. TDS staff helped set up a special page where TAB members could have a voice on the TDS website and a private page where they could share ideas and thoughts following (and in between) their quarterly meetings as needed.

A major focal point of time, energy, and interest for the 2011–2012 board members began in the fall of 2011 as they embarked upon developing an idea to build a TDS Teen Memorial. TAB members brought their ideas and designs to each meeting, and by the spring of 2012, the TAB had developed a strong enough plan to begin requesting funding to support this project. While still a concept at present (see Figure 10), TDS is waiting to hear results of several grant submittals/requests (primarily from the State Farm Foundation) in the fall of 2012. The TAB members played an instrumental role in this process. TDS applied for two State Farm grants through its Youth Advisory Board. A proposal requirement was to have a student voice in the proposal and plan for the funding, and two of the TAB members agreed to volunteer for this role and provide answers for the application. Michael Caballero with Creekview High School was the student sponsor of the Teen Memorial concept, and Mindy Le with Garland High School was the student sponsor on the TAB Expansion grant. Both Michael and Mindy will be second-year members for the upcoming 2012–2013 TAB.

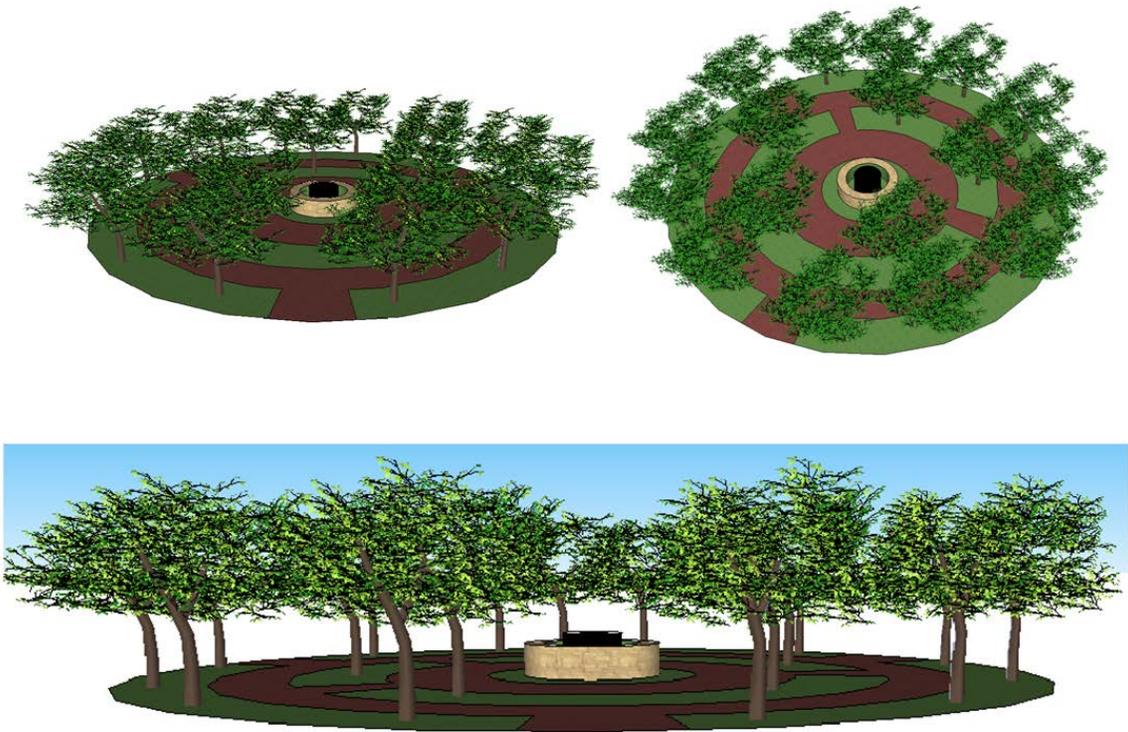
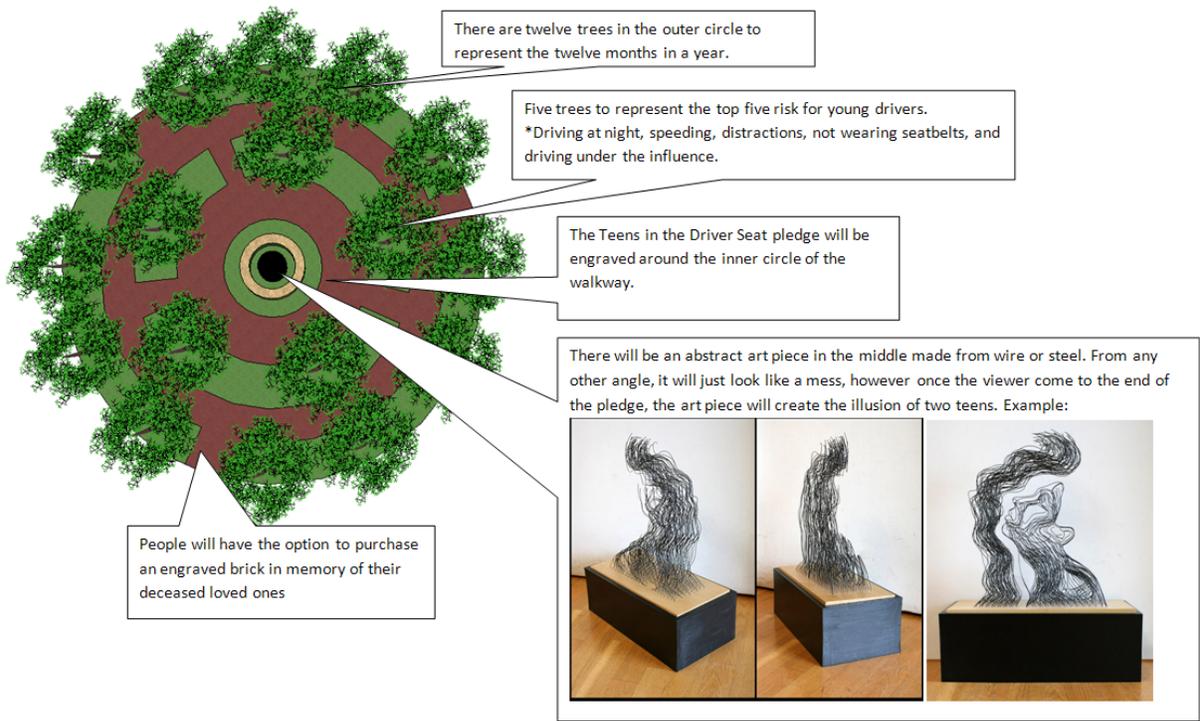


Figure 10. TDS Teen Memorial Conceptual Design

TAB members also led a number of activities in their communities. For example, Mindy Le and Jessica Santibanez from Garland, Texas, encouraged safety behind the wheel and promoted TDS (see <http://www.t-driver.com/2011/09/21/garland-students-highlighted-in-local-paper/>). TAB members also helped promote internal events, like applying for the new TAB, by hanging posters and putting together a video ad. They could direct friends to view the ad on the TDS website or play it in their local schools (see <http://youtu.be/0IAiY10s6IM>).

In addition, TAB members reviewed the (pending draft) Texas Driver's Handbook (which has not been revised since 2008) and provided teen feedback on what they felt was useful and helpful in that guidebook. They also provided unique ideas that would encourage more teens to actively use the guide. Their suggestions were provided to the review committee in charge of updating the current manual, upon which TDS Director Russell Henk serves.

TAB members also offered feedback on promotional items they would like to see provided by TDS in the future to help spread the word on how to be a safe driver and passenger. This 2011–2012 group liked the idea of having TDS book covers and helped finalize designs for this new promotional item, intended to be available for schools starting in the fall of 2012.

TAB members were recognized by Texas Secretary of State Hope Andrade at the Texas State Capitol on May 4, 2012, for their great achievements in helping to save teen lives and helped celebrate TDS's 10th anniversary (see Figure 11).



**Figure 11. 2011–2012 TAB Members with Texas Secretary of State Hope Andrade**

TAB members also nominated and helped recognize nine TDS SponStars. SponStars are non-student teachers/sponsors that have gone above and beyond the basic requirements for the TDS program. These SponStars were nominated for their outstanding efforts and leadership. The SponStar winners represented seven different cities (Carrollton, Eagle Pass, El Paso, Garland, Houston, and Paris, Texas, and Chatsworth, Georgia) and were recognized as part of TDS Day at the Texas State Capitol this year (see Figure 12).



**Figure 12. 2011–2012 SponStar Winners with Texas Secretary of State Hope Andrade**

Furthermore, TAB members helped lead the core group of the TDS program—the TDS schools and the student teams that actively spread the TDS message. Many of the TAB schools were recognized as the first-, second-, and third-place winners of the TDS Cup Challenge at the high school level. These TAB schools represented six different cities (Bronte, Carrollton, El Paso, Garland, Laredo, and Paris, Texas).

### ***2012–2013 Teen Advisory Board***

In May 2012, TDS welcomed 24 student members for the new 2012–2013 Teen Advisory Board, the largest board to date. These members were also invited to the May 4, 2012, TDS Day at the Texas State Capitol and participated in a joint meeting of the 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 TABs. This meeting was held in a legislative hearing room at the Texas State Capitol (see Figure 13).



**Figure 13. Joint Meeting of the 2011–2013 TAB Members**

Of the 23 new members, four are returning members from the 2011–2012 group. The 2012–2013 TAB represents 13 different cities across the state of Texas (Bandera, Bronte, Carrollton, Duncanville, Eagle Pass, El Paso, Garland, Houston, Laredo, Midlothian, Paris, Sumner, and Wells) and includes the first out-of-state board member, who represents Chatsworth, Georgia. Each member applied and was selected for his or her outstanding merit and pledge of commitment. Members will continue the work of the prior boards as well as develop their own projects throughout the year. This new board is highlighted in Figure 14.

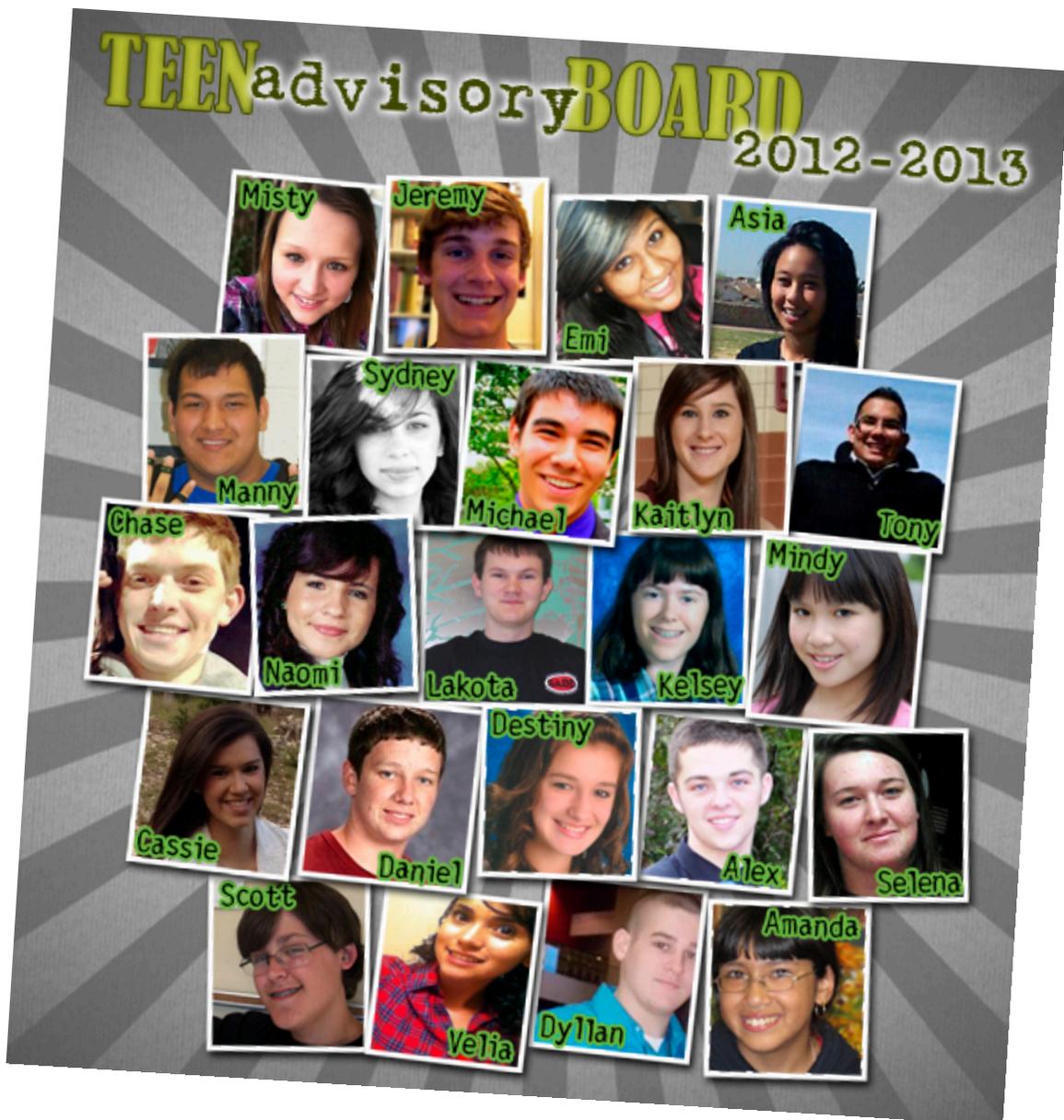


Figure 14. 2012–2013 TDS Teen Advisory Board Members

### Findings

With the implementation of quarterly video-conferencing-based meetings, attendance grew from 49% to 82%, with 7 of the 14 members attending all meetings. The number of returning teens also increased to a record number of four out of nine eligible members reapplying for nomination (i.e., nearly half). Refinements will continue to be made as this dynamic program moves forward, but the current format seems to be working much better. The funds made available via the UTCM have been extremely valuable in helping the TAB meet regularly and providing proper support to make the group’s activities and progress productive.

## Conclusions

The TDS TAB positions are becoming more prestigious and popular. This group allows young people a direct voice in the leadership and future direction of the overall TDS program. The TAB also affords them an excellent leadership opportunity and a chance to add important community service activities and credits to their resumes. TAB members are often highlighted in the media (see Figure 15), providing these teens and their sponsors positive media coverage.



Figure 15. TAB Member Highlighted in the Local Media

## References

More information about Teens in the Driver Seat can be found at <http://t-driver.com>.

Teen Advisory Board member information can be found at <http://dev.t-driver.com/about/teen-advisory-board/>.



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