

Dear Middle School Partner,

A new school year is here and Youth of Virginia Speak Out About Traffic Safety (YOVASO) is ready to work with you and your students to make a difference on our roadways! We hope you will join us for the 2024 **Drive for Change: Buckle Up and Slow Down** project in partnership with the Virginia State Police (VSP) and with sponsorship from State Farm and the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). This innovative project is offered to all high schools, middle schools, and youth groups across the commonwealth and addresses both seat belt use and speed-prevention. By educating our middle school students early, we can help them develop safe behaviors and attitudes prior to the driving years.

According to the Virginia DMV, in 2023, 72% of fatal crashes involving teen drivers (ages 15-19) were speed-related in Virginia and 47% of teens killed in crashes were unrestrained. YOVASO is working hard to bring change to those numbers and we want you to join us by participating in our fall project.

The Drive for Change: Buckle Up and Slow Down project is available from September 16- November 15, 2024. This timeframe gives schools and youth groups the flexibility to plan and complete activities at their own pace. New this year, YOVASO will provide a Project Guide and Toolkit to make participating at any level simpler. There are two options for participating: non-competing and competing. Schools and youth groups that elect to compete for prizes will register for materials and are required to complete the components listed on page 2 of the Project Toolkit. Non-competing schools may register to receive materials and complete activities of their choice without competing in all the components of the competition. **All levels of participation are encouraged and even the simplest of activities will help us reach and impact young lives!** When registering, if you are unsure which level of participation is best for your students, you can always notify us during the project to change your selection.

The **Middle School-Age Project Focus** is to influence youth to form a lifelong buckle up habit by reminding them that seat belts are their best defense against injury and death in a crash. The project also emphasizes the importance of knowing your rights as a passenger in a vehicle and speaking up if you feel unsafe. **The project will also include a Halloween component to remind all youth and teens to make good choices and celebrate safely during the celebratory weekend.**

YOVASO encourages all schools and youth groups to participate by filling out the online [Registration and Order Form](#) to receive free educational and incentive materials on seat belt safety.

For more details, cash prize information, and guidelines for competing schools and youth groups, refer to pages 1-2 of the [Project Toolkit](#) or visit www.yovaso.org/driveforchange. To ensure your school or youth group receives materials on time, **please submit the Registration and Order Form by 5:00pm on August 23.**

Have fun with the project and help us encourage all students to develop a habit of buckling up and slowing down and being a safe passenger! Feel free to also add messaging on other traffic safety concerns that are an issue for students in your community, such as pedestrian safety.

Best Wishes,

Casey Taylor, YOVASO Program Development Coordinator