KINGWOOD — Preston High students learned about the dangers of driving under the influence thanks to the DUI Simulator Program brought to the school by the Virginia Alcohol Beverage Control Administration (VWABCA).

The program is sponsored by State Farm, the West Virginia Governor’s Highway Safety Program and the National Alcoholic Beverage Control Association, and has traveled to all the public and private high schools in West Virginia, according to Gig Robinson.

Several students were surprised at their reactions as the simulator increased in difficulty while mimicking blood alcohol levels (BAC) from 0.02 to 0.08.

“I was all over the place,” Gabriella Gamk said. “And I thought I was being cautious.”

“I didn’t think it was going to be that hard,” Ben Dietz said. “I am definitely not going to drink and drive.”

Student Dan Lowe said the controls of the simulator became more unresponsive the longer he drove.

“At first it was nothing,” Lowe said. “I was just traveling calmly on a snow covered road, then I wasn’t.”

The simulator has various programs for snow-covered roads, sunny days and then can throw in a fog, rain and nighttime scenarios.

The simulation is a three-minute program, but most participants did not make it through the whole thing without having an accident or being pulled over by the police.

The program encourages youth to make good decisions while behind the wheel and throughout life.

“Students care more about making good decisions than people sometimes give them credit for,” Robinson said. “They care about their future, wanting to work and have their freedom.”

“This simulator reinforces the need to make those wise decisions,” Robinson continued.

PHS Teacher Bruce Huggins said he has been bringing the program to PHS for a couple years now.

“This is a great teaching tool for the students,” Huggins said. “We also use the goggles in class that impair their vision and also mimic drunk driving, but this program is really an eye opener.”

In addition to the simulator, WVABCA Educator Dan Pickens spoke with the students talking about the consequences of DUI driving.

Pickens asked students what the possible penalties were for DUI driving, and in less than 30 seconds the students rattled off answers of fines, points on their driver’s license, revoked license and jail time.

“You understand the reality to be able to name those that fast, and accurately know what is going to happen,” Pickens said.

“If you understand what is going to happen,” Pickens said. “What do we still see so many DUIs?”

“Because you never think it could happen to you,” Gamk said. “And it impairs your judgment.”

“Absolutely,” Pickens said. “All of you know what to not to do and how to avoid it.”

“Number one is not to drink and drive,” Pickens continued. “Number two, if you are, have a designated driver.”

Preston Principal Dr. David Patrick, center, speaks with driver’s education students as they wait to get into the DUI Simulator on Wednesday. WVABCA educator Dan Pickens, left, discussed the consequences of DUI driving with the students.

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