

# OHS boasts improved seat belt use



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By DOUG CARDER, Herald Staff Writer

Ottawa High School students buckled down and took a seat-belt challenge to heart this spring.

Students increased their seat-belt use 20 percent, from 61 percent in January to 81 percent in April, a pair of surveys found. The surveys were part of the new driver safety initiative: Seatbelts are for Everyone.

The program started in January with the goal of increasing seat belt use among high school students, Dennis Butler, Ottawa police chief, said.

“The kids knocked it out of the park,” Butler said Friday morning before an assembly at the school to announce the survey results.

In mid-January, student leaders conducted an unannounced seat belt survey at the entrances of the parking lots at OHS, 1120 S. Ash St., during a two-day period. Overall seat belt use was 64 percent and 57 percent for the two days, according to an Ottawa Police Department news release. The compiled results produced about a 61 percent average.

When the final survey was completed over two days in April, OHS students showed a marked increase to 81 percent, Butler said. He credited much of the success of the safety initiative to the student leaders coordinating the effort: Jaime Birzer, Frankie Hernandez and Tabitha McPheron.

“The dramatic increase in seat belt usage by our students has made them safer when traveling by car, and we hope it will create permanent habits that will protect them and their loved ones for a lifetime,” Butler said. “Due to the success of this year’s effort, the Ottawa Police Foundation has committed to funding the program again next year. Our goal is to reach a seat belt usage rate of 100 percent among high schoolers.”

Each month of the program, students who signed pledge cards promising to wear their seat belts 100 percent of the time were eligible to win \$25 gift cards. Students found not wearing their seat belts were ineligible for the drawing that month, a news release said.

OHS junior Adam Leach won the grand-prize drawing for an iPad and picked up his prize during the assembly Friday.

The first-time safety initiative was supported by the Ottawa Police Foundation, Kansas AAA Traffic Safety Fund, State Farm Insurance and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment’s Regional Trauma Program.

Those interested in providing financial support for the youth safety program can learn more about the initiative at the Ottawa Police Foundation’s website — [www.ottawapolicefoundation.org](http://www.ottawapolicefoundation.org) — and supporters can send a tax-deductible donation to the Ottawa Police Foundation at 715 W. 2nd St., Ottawa, KS 66067.

In announcing the results Friday, OHS Principal Rick Johnson congratulated students and urged them to continue wearing their seat belts.