Everyone has a backpack. Boys tend to wear jeans and T-shirts; girls wear skirts or pants. Boys and girls wear earrings and talk about the same music. To an outsider, it looks like just another typical day at J.E.B. Stuart High School.

And get away they do. Teenagers in many states in the United States can get a license at the age of 16 and most are eager to start driving right away. Teen drivers have a higher rate of road accidents, however. Because of that, the student drivers at Stuart will have to follow their parents' rules: No talking or texting on your cell phone while driving. Remember to wear your seat belt.

Conversations, especially among the boys, quickly turn to cars. "A car means freedom," one says. "You can go anywhere—your car is your life." One boy, who is saving his part-time job earnings[2] for a car, says, "With a car I could go with my friends to the beach or to New York. Life in general can get overwhelming sometimes. Doesn't everyone want to get away?"

But running beneath the common fashion and attitude[1] are their cultural differences at home: many of the students have parents who came to the United States from other countries. Walking through the halls of Stuart, one meets students from a variety of different backgrounds: an African American, an Afghan Italian, a Cambodian, and a Palestinian. The students take pride in their diversity even as they try to fit in as everyday American teenagers.

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These are normal American teenagers whose parents happen to come from all over the world. They may have one foot in their parents' culture, but they share one thing with their US-born classmates: They all have one foot on the gas pedal . . . and they are ready to go!

Back at Stuart High, at 2:05 p.m., the school day ends, and a rush to buses and cars begins. Some students get rides with parents or friends. Others get to drive themselves. Music blares[1] from car radios and the kids who are left behind sit on the grass talking, laughing, and just hanging out with friends.

For most new drivers, it's important for a car to be attractive and cool: They want a new car that can "make a statement." Their parents, on the other hand, are looking for a car for their child that is economical, affordable, and most of all, safe. As a result, most teens start driving with the family car that's available—which is usually the oldest, least attractive one of the bunch.

Don't drive too fast. Commuting to school is all right, but driving in the city's rush hour is not allowed. When taking the car out, remember to bring it home on time. Being safe, reliable, and punctual is important, say parents.

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