

NTSB FORUM

BARRY FORD

Driver & Traffic Safety Education Consultant

Tuesday, October 28, 2003

1:30 – 5:00 p.m. State Programs, Their Effectiveness and Needs

WHAT'S RIGHT WITH VERMONT DRIVER EDUCATION AND WHAT'S NEEDED TO IMPROVE IT?

The NTSB Forum on Driver Education and Training is a very special opportunity to survey the current state of novice driver education in the United States. Vermont's state of driver education and traffic safety is strong and healthy due to a number of factors. I will focus on what's right and why Vermont is often considered to be a leader in novice driver education. Emphasis will be placed on teacher preparation, professional development, ties to the Department of Education Framework of Standards and Vital Results, curriculum, parent involvement, partnerships and collaboration with national associations. Also addressed will be the recommendations for making Vermont and other state's Driver and Traffic Safety Education programs better.

TEACHER PREPARATION:

Vermont has a very high standard of teacher training. Instructors, both public school and commercial, must complete two hundred and seventy hours of training for an initial endorsement in Driver and Traffic Safety Education. This includes 6 three-credit courses sponsored by the Vermont Department of Education (DOE), Vermont Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association (VDTSEA), and the Vermont college system. Public school driver educators must be licensed teachers with the Vermont Department of Education. Commercial instructors are granted a license through the Department of Motor Vehicles. Only Department of Education licensed teachers may teach in the public schools.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Vermont DOE requires each public school driver educator to remain current in their knowledge of Driver and Traffic Safety Education. Teachers are required to receive nine continuing education credits every seven years to maintain their license to teach. Vermont teachers attain this through elective graduate course work relevant to traffic safety, workshops and conference attendance. Teachers in VT public schools are also required to work on local action plans which result in greater standardization of programs linked to the DOE Framework of Standards and Vital Results.

VERMONT CURRICULUM

Vermont has worked with Dr. Fred Mottola and the National Institute for Driver Behavior (NIDB) for many years to develop a risk prevention education curriculum as compared to driver education that is merely concerned with the successful outcome of a task. The Vermont curriculum requires the student to take the best risk-prevention actions during the performance of a task. The curriculum is an attempt to place driver education on a higher level that will provide students with a lifelong risk prevention education. The Vermont Department of Education has incorporated the curriculum into Vermont's Framework of Standards and Vital Results. Also included are the American Driver Traffic Safety Education Association and Vermont Driver Traffic Safety Education Association minimum standards for driver performance. The Vermont NIDB Curriculum Resource Guide has complete assessment standards for both classroom and in-vehicle performance of concepts and key behaviors. The complete resource guide has been available since 2001 and most recently, is available in electronic format. It has been made available through regional training and workshops to both public school and commercial school instructors. One Vermont teacher says, "A definite strength of my program is the curriculum and methodology. Students say every semester how parents and friends were terrible teachers, and how easy we make it."

IN SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Driver Education is provided free of charge in the public school system, to any student whose parent or legal guardian is a resident of the state of Vermont. This is unique to most instruction in the US today. The state reimbursement to schools remains the same as it was when first legislated in 1966. Public schools receive \$71.00 per student. This amount covered almost all of the school's expenses in 1966 but covers only approximately 21% of today's costs. Slightly over 7200 Vermont students complete driver education annually. Commercial driving schools in Vermont account for approximately 17% of the students under 18 years of age that are trained. Another consideration in regards to commercial training is the fact that 13 of 20 of the commercial schools in Vermont are owned and taught by public school instructors. This in-school instruction is enhanced through access to computer labs, special education and support staff for students with individual education plans (IEP).

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Vermont has always stressed the importance of parent involvement in the development of novice drivers. Most schools in VT had strong programs that guided parents through the supervision stage long before the requirements associated with Graduated Driver Licensing. The DOE has provided specific supervising driving guides to every student in driver education. The guide closely follows the Vermont NIDB curriculum being used in most schools. Teachers say, "The Supervising Driving Guide, used statewide, enhances the students' experience behind the wheel in conjunction with GDL laws and makes practice driving more beneficial to both student and parent." Parent nights and meetings help to enhance the use of these materials.

VERMONT PARTNERSHIPS

Being a small state, VT has the ability to partner with many organizations and associations. There is also a strong collaboration of state agencies. To name a few, the Governor's Highway Safety Policy Council consists of the DOE (Driver and Traffic Safety Office), Chiefs of Police, Sheriff's Department, State Police, Emergency Medical Technicians, Emergency Nurses CARE, Department of Motor Vehicles, Alcohol Drug Abuse Programs (ADAP), Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS) and the VT Teen Leadership Safety Program. Many of these agencies and programs work with the driver education programs in schools to increase the importance of traffic safety.

The most important aspect of collaboration comes from the Vermont Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association. Ninety two percent of the licensed driver educators in Vermont are members of the state association and strong advocates for traffic safety. The Association helps to sponsor teacher training, professional development and financial aide to attend conferences and courses. VDTSEA and the DOE sponsor and maintain a "skid monster" vehicle to enhance instruction in skid prevention. The vehicle also reinforces theory taught in the Vermont NIDB Curriculum. Two members of the Association are in attendance at this forum.

STUDIES

It is interesting to see the similarities of a class study conducted by VIT and the University of TURKU in Sweden and what is being done in the VT Driver & Traffic Safety Education program today. The Swedish literature review was carried out on commission from the Swedish National Road Administration with additional funding from the Swedish Agency for Innovative Systems. The review was carried out from January to April 2003.

The review states: "In order to be a safe driver, it is not enough to be able to control the vehicle well and in accordance with the traffic rules. It is also important to have a realistic assessment of one's own ability to control the vehicle, to drive in traffic and to be aware of what motives and preference govern our own behavior and choices. The knowledge about where risks in traffic may occur is crucial." The Vermont risk-prevention curriculum guide addresses just these issues.

The Swedish literature also states “The content of the high school education should not focus on vehicle maneuvering and control, but more general aspects belonging to the higher levels of the GDE matrix.” Vermont does this through repeated practices in class and in-vehicle of the key student behaviors of risk management.

Another outcome of the study states: “In driver education risk awareness methods should be used on a regular basis and as a standard procedure to gain changes in attitudes. Educational methods that might be appropriate to increase driver skills for self-evaluation include e.g. improved feedback during training, self evaluation tools like questionnaires and scales, discussions with other drivers about personal experiences and evaluations made by instructors or examiners.” Vermont addresses this in its curriculum through concurrent class and in-vehicle sessions, instructor feedback and student lead activities both in class and in the vehicle.

The Swedish study also found the introduction of short professional courses in exchange for a reduction of general practicing periods has not proved to be beneficial for safety. The extended practice that is achieved during this period seems to give more safety benefits than the currently evaluated courses. Vermont public school driver education has programs that average nine weeks during the regular school year and six weeks during the summer programs. The longer programs, as recommended by the VT Department of Education, allow greater time to practice key behaviors under supervision of the public school instructor and establish well coordinated, structured parent involvement programs.

Vermont also addresses the research that states a need for structure of the supervised practice. Vermont driver education stresses the importance of lessons going from simple to complex in nature and the importance of providing structured parent involvement through the use of a supervised driving guide which compliments the school curriculum.

WEAKNESSES & LOGISTICAL PROBLEMS

Vehicle Acquisition – Since the early 70’s, it has been harder and harder to acquire vehicles for public school use. The days of the major auto manufacturers providing free loan vehicles have been long gone. Many dealers have discontinued programs or increased rental costs to the point where school budgets can no longer support Driver and Traffic Safety Education programs. Schools have in some cases resorted to purchasing vehicles and keeping them for long periods of time.

State Aid – The Vermont Department of Education has received the same amount of funding from the state transportation budget every year since 1966 when federal legislation mandated Driver Education. More and more of the burden is placed on local school districts to fund programs at tax payer expense. Even so, people support driver education in the Vermont public schools. Parents want driver education.

Minimum Standards – Vermont requires 30 hours of classroom and 6 hours of in-vehicle instruction. This timeframe was established in the 1940’s. The Vermont curriculum and teacher training methods provide the instructor with much more material than can be addressed in 30 hours and the establishment of habits and key behaviors require more than six hours of in-vehicle

assessment especially if regulations allow one hour of instruction for each student per lesson. Also, the Department of Education has very little authority to review programs. National standards for review and assessment of programs should be established.

Technology – Curriculum and teaching methods require the driver education classroom to be equipped with much greater computer technology with advanced programming. Interactive software programs presently available enhance the student experience in Vermont where available. Chalkboard and showing videos are no longer acceptable methods of instruction with today's youth.

In 2000, a one time grant associated with Graduated Driver Licensing funded the acquisition of technology equipment such as laptops, digital cameras and software to a small number of schools. The result of this grant program was extremely positive in relation to the enhancement of the Driver Education programs. Students and teachers localized their programs through video, power point and other media presentations that increased awareness not only in their classes but also collaborating with parent involvement and community projects.

"Skid Monster" Accessibility – VDTSEA and the Vermont Department of Education sponsor a vehicle specifically designed to support the scientific aspects and behaviors of vehicle control. Training facilities around the state with ranges to accommodate these vehicles are necessary to increase its' usage.

Stronger Regulations Needed:

- Mandate increased course time for both public school and commercial programs.
- Increase more professional development requirements for commercial school instructors equal to Vermont public school teachers. Presently the commercial schools are overseen by the Vermont DMV and individuals with no traffic safety education or background. They come from the licensing team.
- Increase minimum age to receive Vermont learner permit from 15 to 16.
- Increase minimum age to receive Vermont junior operator license from 16 to 17.
- Mandate traffic safety education into a K-12 curriculum

Incentives:

- Colleges need to receive incentives to reinstate traffic safety courses as a part of education degrees.
- Teachers need incentives from school districts to become certified.
- Parents need incentives to participate in quality programs with their children.

Where Do We Go From Here?

It is hoped that this symposium will be the beginning of a national movement to address the needs to improve driver education. With traffic crashes being our most serious health problem and the leading cause of death to our nation's fifteen to twenty year olds, it is imperative we strive to develop solutions to this epidemic and not have these problems continue to escalate.