

National Transportation Safety Board Forum on Driver Education And Training
October 29, 2003

Associations Panel

Presenter: Randall Thiel, Ph.D., President of the American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association

Topic: Issues pertaining to the current state of driver education and initiatives underway to improve novice driver safety

Good morning. It is indeed an honor and privilege to have been invited to attend and present at this forum. I would like to thank the NTSB and all those responsible for this forum, and to all the participants who are involved. It is certainly hoped that after this forum, traffic safety education will be given a renewed and positive attention throughout our country.

In the invitation that I received, I was informed that as a representative of the American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association (here on to be referred to as ADTSEA) I was to present on "issues pertaining to the current state of driver education and initiatives underway to improve novice driver safety."

Prior to getting into specific categories or specific issues, I would first like to provide some background about ADTSEA. Many of our members are involved directly in public school driver education programs, however our membership also includes individuals from higher education, commercial driving schools, and businesses and organizations with strong ties to driver and traffic safety. Approximately 33 state driver education associations are affiliate members with ADTSEA.

There are many issues that pertain to the current state of driver education, which ADTSEA is interested in, concerned about, and invests significant amounts of time and resources. In an effort to conform to the allotted time provided me, I have decided to first present to you some major categories in which numerous issues can be grouped.

The main groupings or categories include:

- * Curriculum
- * Instruction: Instructor Certification and Preparation, and Improvement of Instruction
- Professional Development
- Program Support

After sharing thoughts and ideas pertaining to these groupings, I will also share some other issues of concern to ADTSEA. But before going into any discussion I

think it would be valuable to appreciate the current status of driver education and training. To do this I share the following points:

- 1) There has been a marked decline in federal and state level support for driver education as a priority traffic safety initiative, even though no public outcry to eliminate programs.
- 2) There has been a decline in driver education programs in our nation's public schools. Economy is a major factor along with impacts of negative or biased publicity.
- 3) There has been a major move and effort over the past 10 or more years in redefining driver education, and in efforts to be able to articulate how important of a component driver education is in our Graduated Driver Licensing systems.

Given the three statements above, I now will attempt to provide insights regarding the four categories I listed/shared.

Curriculum

In an effort to explore ways to improve driver education and to begin emphasizing the desire for States to adopt Graduated Driver Licensing, the NHSTA embarked upon a project in 1993. ADTSEA became a partner in this effort and helped in conducting a review of driver education by assuming a lead role.

In the review stage of this initiative, it was soon realized that driver education programs differed in what was expected of students, in the content of driver education programs, and in the amount of time dedicated to instruction. Attention and concern focused first on developing curriculum standards, realizing a need to move away from time-based standards to standards that are based more on student outcomes and performance.

ADTSEA took a lead in partnering with several other groups, in coming up with curriculum standards that were created and drafted in terms of what students should know and be able to do. Then, to compliment the standards, curriculum content was drafted for both classroom and in-car instructional phases. Emphasis was placed on topics and content directly related to the driving task. In review of what existing programs included, ADTSEA went about creating a curriculum that focuses on content directly related to the safe and efficient operation of a vehicle, and skills most closely associated to the driving task, visual perceptual skills, and good decision making.

If one were to review the sample curriculum, they may find that some topics that are included in many local programs may not be included in the ADTSEA

curriculum. Again, some of these topics may tie more towards consumerism than the driving task. When looking at the ADTSEA curriculum if additional topics are locally included, unless additional time is given to the curriculum, it is believed something else in the curriculum would suffer.

Once the topics and contents were developed, ADTSEA provided estimates on the amount of time that would be needed to cover each area. The sample curriculum developed suggests that a minimum of 40-45 hours of instruction would be needed.

Summation of some key issues around Curriculum would include: What is Driver Education?; Program Standards that are more outcome/performance based than time based; What content should be included in a novice driver education program?; and, how to articulate program that it is a component in Graduated Driver Licensing?

Key Efforts to improve driver education by ADTSEA would include the development of curriculum standards that are outcome based more than time based; development of a sample curriculum that can be used for those interested; and various other curriculum resources including complete lesson plans.

The resources just mentioned are available on the ADTSEA website at:
www.adtsea.iup.edu

Instruction

Several issues and concerns are directly related to the second category which I labeled as instruction. Those I would like to briefly highlight and briefly discuss deal with instructor preparation (including standards and certification requirements), availability, delivery and quality of programs.

One concern around instructor preparation deals with standards or requirements that exist to become a licensed instructor. Different states have different teacher certification requirements, and it is not uncommon to find that different delivery systems within states have separate instructor certification requirements. Wouldn't a more uniform program of instructor preparation be an admirable goal?

ADTSEA believes in that goal and has been involved with several partners at both redefining what should be included in an instructor preparation program and in creating a model certification program. In addition, attention was given to establishing an instructor preparation program that would accommodate instructor candidates from all types of novice driver education program delivery systems (public, private or commercial school).

Availability of quality instructor preparation programs is also an issue impacting driver education. Over the years there has been a significant decline in the number of instructor preparation programs available to individuals interested in working towards certification. Some of those that have survived, have had to modify their delivery, which in some cases has reduced the stringency and quality of some of their programs' components. Unfortunately, if different options exist, the nature of many people will be to select an option that places convenience and ease over quality.

Summation of Instruction:

Lack of uniform instructor certification requirements, a decline in the numbers and availability of instructor prep programs, and maintaining quality within instructor preparation programs are current issues and concerns.

ADSTEA has been involved in efforts to improve the current status of teacher preparation. A model teacher preparation program has been developed, that can accommodate individuals regardless of the system in which they will teach.

Professional Development

The third category I listed deals with Professional Development. In all the professional fields that I can think of, individuals licensed in those areas are required to periodically obtain or take part in Professionals activities, workshops, conferences, courses, etc. related to their respective fields in order to be able to renew their respective professional license. ADTSEA believes in requiring professionals to maintain an ongoing professional development plan, and it understands that one of its major roles is to help in planning, conducting and supporting professional development activities where and whenever it can.

One example of the ongoing involvement and efforts of ADTSEA to improve professional development opportunities form traffic safety educators is its annual National Conference. Special efforts and attention is given to providing quality sessions and speakers that address and target the goal of trying to provide experiences of attendees that will help improve their curriculum, instruction and learning experiences they provide to novice drivers.

ADTSEA is also active in hosting and facilitating various workshops as special pre-conference events or in going out to local, state or regional events being sponsored by an affiliated state association or related organization. Numerous requests are submitted to ADTSEA each year for ADTSEA to help in providing technical assistance or programming targeting professional development events and activities. ADTSEA stands ready to lend assistance and support whenever and wherever it can.

Each year the Association plans and coordinates its national conference. In 2003 it was conducted in Charlotte, North Carolina; this coming summer, it will be

in Portland, Oregon. I would imagine that this summit will provide a significant amount of attention for conference activity fodder in Portland.

Summation for Professional Development:

ADTSEA believes that ongoing professional development should be a requirement for all individuals who wish to maintain a license to teach driver education.

Professional development is a major part of the work initiatives and efforts of ADTSEA. Major forms include (but are not limited to) conferences, workshops, courses, and involvement in funded projects. Quality professional development activities help keep teachers: current; enlightened and hopefully encourages or motivates them to become more engaged in their respective roles and positions.

At this time I would entertain any questions that might help clarify any of my comments I have just shared. Again, thank you for affording this forum and allowing all of us to be a part of this event. This forum will hopefully shed some light on what needs to be considered and done to improve upon the quality of instruction and in the ways and things we do to prepare our novice drivers to hopefully become safe and responsible drivers.

Other Issues

- Home Schooling/Parent Taught Driver Education
- Program delivery alternatives – Is there a line in the sand?
 - Independent study
 - Web-based interactive – individuals' capacity likely not able to meet technological demands
 - Web-enhanced
 - Home schooled programs (program taught entirely by parents)
- Advanced driving skills
 - When to offer (novice or with some experience?)
 - What to offer?
 - Costs/Investments to provide – can all programs currently handle this?
- Public Relations effort nationwide is needed to educate public to counteract all the negative publicity given to driver education over the years - public awareness about driver education is lacking