

**NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD  
PUBLIC FORUM  
DRIVER EDUCATION AND TRAINING  
October 28-29, 2003**

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In Michigan, as well as the rest of the country, driver education is at a crossroad, and we need to decide which road we are willing to take. I am pleased that the National Transportation Safety Board has convened this forum to take a look at driver education in the United States. Hopefully, one outcome of this meeting will be to recognize that the status quo is not working, and it is now time for all involved in traffic safety to step up to the plate and get involved with the education of our youthful drivers.

In 1955, in a special session of the legislature, Michigan became the first state to require driver education prior to licensing young adults under the age of 18, and mandate driver education in all public schools. Drivers up to the age of 18 were and are currently required to satisfactorily complete a Michigan Department of Education approved driver education program. The purpose of this legislation was to educate novice drivers and thereby reduce accidents through a safety-oriented course of instruction.

In 1996, Michigan became the first state to pass a comprehensive graduated driver licensing (GDL) law, which included two segments of driver education and three levels of licensure. Below is an outline of Michigan's GDL system.

## **MICHIGAN'S GRADUATED LICENSING SYSTEM**

### **DRIVER EDUCATION – SEGMENT 1**

- Minimum age of 14 years and 8 months
- Vision/health screening prior to behind the wheel experience
- 24 hours of classroom
- 6 hours behind the wheel (range instruction may be substituted for up to 3 hours on street)
- Written exam (100 question, multiple choice)

### **LEVEL 1 LICENSE**

- No \$ fee
- Minimum age of 14 years and 9 months
- Vision exam (administered at Secretary of State branch office)
- Health standards certification
- Written approval of parents
- May drive only with parent or designated licensed adult age 21 or older

### **PREPARATION FOR DRIVER EDUCATION – SEGMENT 2**

- Minimum 30 of the required 50 hours of behind the wheel driving with parent, including 2 of the required 10 hours night-time driving
- Minimum of 3 months between completion of Segment 1 and enrollment in Segment 2

### **DRIVER EDUCATION – SEGMENT 2**

- 6 hours of classroom instruction (no driving instruction required)
- Written exam (optional)

### **PREPARATION FOR ROAD TEST**

- Complete what remains of the required 50 hours behind the wheel; including what remains of the 10 hours required for night driving
- Review study guides

### **ROAD TEST**

- Conducted by private, third party examiner – licensed by Michigan Department of State
- \$ Fee will vary
- Minimum of 6 months at Level 1
- Vehicle inspection
- Off-roadway test
- On-roadway test

### **LEVEL 2 LICENSE**

- \$ Fee
- Minimum 16 years of age
- 90 days crash/violation free prior to application for Level 2 license
- May drive without supervision **except** from midnight to 5 a.m. Driving is permitted from midnight to 5 a.m. only if driving to and/or from employment or with a parent or designated adult age 21 or older

### **LEVEL 3 LICENSE**

- No \$ fee
- Minimum 17 years of age
- Minimum of 6 months at Level 2
- 12 consecutive months of violation/crash free driving prior to application for Level 3 license
- Full driving privileges with no restrictions

### **Michigan's Public School Driver Education Programs**

As previously noted, public schools were required to offer driver education. In 1998, a year after GDL passed, that requirement was eliminated. The thought at the time was that many public school districts would discontinue offering driver education, using the reason that driver education was costing the district too much. However, currently 80% of the public school districts (with high school grade levels) still offer driver education. Unfortunately, there are only a couple of districts that offer driver education as part of the regular school day. Most offer it after school and summers.

In FY2001, 460 public school districts offered segment 1 driver education to 78,112 students, and segment 2 to 58,420 students. The average per pupil cost to offer a segment 1 class was \$223.94, and \$34.68 per pupil for segment 2, for a total of \$258.62. There is a funding mechanism in place to offset a portion of the costs for driver education. In Michigan, \$4.00 of each driver license fee (original and renewal) goes into a driver education fund. For FY2001, that fund totaled just under over \$7.6 million. The per pupil reimbursement in FY2001 was \$96.59, which covered 37% of the cost of the program. As of 1997, school districts have been allowed to charge a fee for driver education, of which most schools do. Fees range from \$15 to \$300.

### **Michigan's Driver Training School Programs**

The number of driver training schools, sometime referred to as commercial driving schools, has risen steadily over the past four years. When I started with the department (in 2000), there were 110 driver training schools. Currently, there are 154 driver training schools offering teen, driver education instruction. As a comparison (to public school driver education), in 2001, there were 119 driver training schools, which served 44,134 segment 1 students, and 42,903 segment 2 students. The average cost to take driver education at a driver training school is between \$250 and \$300.

## **CURRICULUM**

Michigan's driver education program is divided into two segments, the first being 24 hours of classroom and 6 hours of behind-the-wheel (BTW) instruction. Currently, there is no standard curriculum required or provided for either classroom or BTW. There are, however, 100 classroom and 27 BTW performance objectives that students must demonstrate achievement (at a satisfactory level) to acquire a certificate of completion. The goal of the department is to adopt a national curriculum, adapt it to fit Michigan's needs, and provide it to driver education programs. Segment 2 of driver education consists of 6 hours of classroom instruction. BTW instruction may be provided, but is not required. In 1997, a segment 2 curriculum was created for Michigan by the ADTSEA. Though not a required curriculum, many programs utilize it.

## **DRIVER EDUCATION INSTRUCTOR PREPARATION AND REQUIREMENTS**

### **Qualifications for initial approval of driver education instructors.**

#### Instructors teaching driver education to persons under 18 years of age shall:

- Possess a valid Michigan teaching certificate employed in a public school program. **(NOT required for driver training school instructors).**
- Possess a valid driver's license.
- Be at least 21 years of age.
- Have a personal driving record with no more than 6 points, as assessed by the secretary of state, for moving traffic convictions during the 2 years prior to making application for approval as a driver education instructor (or have been convicted of impaired driving during the 2 years prior to making application).

These are the criteria to be approved by the Department of Education. To work in a driver training school, driver training school instructors must also be licensed by the Department of State, Driver Training and Testing Division. The requirements to be licensed are different, and must also be met to become a driver training school instructor. These include a background check every five years, and a medical exam every two years.

For initial approval to teach driver education, an instructor, in addition to meeting the requirements specified above, shall have earned, through a college or university, the equivalent of 8 semester credits in driver education teacher preparation coursework, as approved by the state board of education. A temporary approval may be granted to teach driver education to an individual who has successfully completed 6 semester credits of approved driver education coursework.

There are three universities in Michigan that offer the instructor preparation courses. In addition, there is an out-of-state college whose students would be eligible for approval.

Finally, the National Teacher Credentialing Program is recognized as meeting the requirements for instructor approval. Between these five programs, over 100 new teachers are trained annually.

## **MICHIGAN PROGRAM STRENGTHS**

- Michigan has been at the forefront of driver education reform, from mandating driver education in public schools in 1955, to passing the GDL law in 1996.
- As research shows, GDL in Michigan has had a substantial impact on lowering crash rates of teen drivers. An initial study conducted by the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute (2001) showed the crashes involving 16-year-olds dropped 25 percent from 1996, the year before the licensing changes, and 1999, the first year all 16-year-olds would have been through the new licensing requirements.
- Michigan has many dedicated driver education instructors, who are active both in-state and nationally. Michigan has the first ADTSEA teacher-of-the-year award recipient. There are approximately 1800 instructors qualified to teach in public school driver education programs, and 500 instructors teaching in driver training schools.
- The requirement of a minimum of 8 semester credits at the college or university level shows the commitment the state has to education.
- Many organizations have realized the importance of driver education, and have provided resources to create educational materials for program providers. Over the past two years, materials (videos and written materials) have been made available to every driver education program covering topics such as: Deer/car crashes; interacting with mature drivers; interacting with large trucks; and parent orientation.

## **NEEDS**

- A strong segment 1 curriculum will assist providers in Michigan to offer a consistent and statewide presentation of driver education throughout the state.
- Many of the current driver education instructors are nearing the age of retirement, and there is a need for younger, dedicated individuals to enter the profession.
- We need to ensure that newly approved instructors are being given the tools to become effective teachers, through the instructor preparation courses and support from the state level.
- We need to take a closer look at K-12 education, and ensure that a traffic safety component is supported throughout the curriculum.

- We need to take a look at the funding mechanism for driver education, to ensure that all eligible teens have the opportunity to receive a quality driver education program.
- Parent participation needs to be increased. Parent meetings prior to or during driver education are not mandated by legislation; however every effort should be made to require parents to become more aware and participate in the learning process.
- New innovative training devices and procedures need to be identified. Many students have different learning styles, and new ways to teach to critical objectives of motivation, attention, evaluation, responsibility, risk management, decision-making, motor skills, etc need to be incorporated in driver education.

## **SUMMATION**

An important question we need to address as traffic safety advocates is: Are we satisfied with the current state of driver education, programs that do a “fairly” good job of preparing youngsters for licensure, or should we aspire and strive to provide those same youngsters with a background that may show positive results in truly reducing teen-age traffic collisions, injuries, and fatalities? They have been a part of the system for many years already, and hopefully the education process they have experienced over the past 15 years has prepared them to become a more active participant. “Driver education” should not be a three-week course in the summer, during which time we have to expect a major attitude overhaul. It won’t happen, as the findings show. “Traffic safety education” should be a lifelong learning process, which starts in the early years. And since it is a lifelong process, parents must take an active part in their children’s education. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported that in 1999, the category of unintentional motor vehicle traffic crashes was the number one cause of injury deaths for individuals ages 1 through 64! As with any learning, parents need to support the educational process by modeling proper behavior and reinforcing their children’s good habits. Encouraging a six year old to wear a helmet when riding a bike, to look both ways when crossing a street, to be respectful when riding a school bus, to wear a seat belt when riding in the family car, these habits will go a long way to creating a positive attitude that will carry over when that student starts the formal driver education program. Are the current, widely accepted standards of 30 hours classroom and 6 hours BTW working? It appears not. Recommendations have been made to expand driver education to 45 hours or more of classroom, 10 hours or more of BTW, divide those hours proportionately between BOTH segment 1 and segment 2 (with BTW being offered during each segment); and to lengthen the time between the two segments (up to a year or more), thus giving the student more adult-supervised driving. If driver education is ever expected to produce safe drivers, it is the FORMAT that must be first changed, not the content, or curriculum, or teaching methods. Those will fall into place. When discussing traffic safety, there is often the reference to the three “E’s”: Engineering, enforcement, and education. I have often noticed advancements in engineering (road construction,

automobile design, etc), and a push for enforcement (i.e. the Click It or Ticket campaign). However, education seems to be far behind in receiving support, especially education for youth. Graduated licensing is working, and now is the time to take a serious look at the educational part of the process. As reported in *Traffic Tech* (a publication of NHTSA), number 200 May 1999, A large majority of Americans (89 percent) consider driver education courses to be very important in training new drivers to drive safely. Do we? If so, what are we going to do about it? To those who question the effectiveness of driver education, I ask: If driver education isn't working, do we accept the current statistics, or do we overhaul the system so that newly licensed teens ARE prepared to become motorists in the highway transportation system.