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## Evaluation of Driver Education in South Dakota

### Study SD2009-03 Executive Summary

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## TABLE OF ACRONYMS

Acronym	Definition
ADTSEA	American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association
DETF	Driver Education Task Force
GDL	Graduated Driver Licensing
SDDOE	South Dakota Department of Education
SDDOT	South Dakota Department of Transportation
SDDEA	South Dakota Driver Education Association
SDDLPL	South Dakota Driver Licensing Program
SDSC	South Dakota Safety Council

## 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This final report addresses the following objectives established in this report titled; “SD2009-03, EVALUATION OF DRIVER EDUCATION IN SOUTH DAKOTA.” The research objectives for this project included:

- Describe driver education programs in South Dakota and compare them to best practices in the United States.
- Recommend a driver education curriculum, and instructor certification requirement updates in consideration of best available practices and specific South Dakota needs.
- Identify resources needed to establish and maintain the recommended driver education curriculum and determine the costs and benefits.
- Develop a methodology and define baseline measures for ongoing effectiveness of driver education programs in South Dakota.

To address these objectives, the research completed each of the following tasks:

- Meet with Technical Panel
- Identify Performance Measures
- Review and Summarize Existing Research
- Conduct Web-based Survey
- Document and Compare Teacher Certification Requirements
- Compare South Dakota with National Best Practices
- Analyze South Dakota Crash Records
- Meet with Technical Panel
- Develop Implementation Plan
- Establish Baseline Measures
- Prepare Final Report
- Make Executive Presentation

Specific findings from the research were presented in four sections, tracking each of the research objectives identified for this project. In most instances, it was necessary to break down the main findings sections into subsections to provide maximum detail and readability to the report. In what follows in this executive summary, we present concise summaries to share what was learned in each of our research areas. Summaries of our recommendations are also provided in this summary to make clear the path the researchers believe should be followed to advance South Dakota driver education and licensing practices and improve statewide performance in the young driver safety area.

### 1.1 Driver Education and Licensing Program Effectiveness

Although the existing research literature does not support the conclusion that driver education activities are an effective means to improve driver safety, we identified a number of areas where the relationship between state driver education and licensing practices were significantly correlated with state crash rates. In particular, we found that the more restrictive a state’s licensing procedures were (e.g., higher age required for licensing, more restrictions for intermediate licenses, and stages for graduated licenses) the better their crash rate ranking was. The same was true for driver education practices, where more explicit requirements for driver education programs were correlated with lower crash rates. Further, our research on South Dakota driver histories shows evidence of a positive relationship between driver safety and the successful completion of driver education in the state. More rigorous evaluation is needed to determine whether these initial observations are reliable. To this end,

future research should utilize random assignment of students, map program objectives and components, and engage in planned performance measurement and standardized data collection. Still, the research done here indicated that both driver education and licensing practices can make a difference in the driving record of young drivers in South Dakota.

## **1.2 National Best Practices in Driver Education and Licensing Programs**

The current research indicates there has been considerable improvement in the young driver safety area throughout the nation. In particular, advances have been made in driver education curriculum development and the integration of that curriculum into the licensing process in states throughout the US, and (more specifically) in those states that are demographically similar to South Dakota. Additional, considerable advances have been observed in the area of program evaluation beyond those achieved in driver education and licensing approaches.

At the center of potential reforms is the effort to standardize driver education experiences, including the adoption of a statewide curriculum and testing/evaluation instruments. It was also shown that time discounts, where young drivers are offered incentives to take driver education to reduce wait time for licensing and/or early removal of licensing restrictions, are not effective means to improve driver safety. The research literature has shown that delaying young driver access to permits, intermediate and full licenses are negatively correlated with young driver crash rates. Here, a negative correlation means that as age requirements for licensing increase, crash rates decrease.

## **1.3 Analysis of South Dakota Driver Education Programming**

The current research demonstrated that South Dakota is doing poorly in terms of per capita young driver crash rates. In this area, South Dakota has the third worst state record for young driver fatalities and fatalities resulting from young driver crashes. Moreover, it was determined that South Dakota has the fewest intermediate licensing provisions and least regulation and oversight of state driver education programs in the nation.

In surveys of driver education instructors and administrators, there was broad support for increasing state oversight and standardization of driver education programs. Both instructors and administrators feel greater access to instructor and student training are needed to improve program outcomes and that greater standardization is similarly needed in the State.

The sample young driver survey conducted for this research showed that although a large majority of young drivers took driver education seriously, most felt that personal and parental instructions were stronger influences on driving behavior than either in-car or classroom activities overseen by driver education instructors.

## **1.4 South Dakota Driver Education Program History 1950s-1980s**

Although it was observed that the state of South Dakota currently has little formal engagement in the planning and oversight of driver education programs, the State does have a rich history of engagement in this area. Previous decades experienced state publication of driver education curriculum, standard evaluation methods, and yearly skills trainings for driver education instructors and students.

## **1.5 Recommendations**

### **1.5.1 Standardize driver education experience of all young drivers in South Dakota**

Our research showed that states requiring driver education have lower crash rates than states that do not require driver education for young drivers. Therefore, we start by recommending that collaborating agencies, in concert with legislative and executive leaders in South Dakota, seek legislation requiring driver education for all young drivers under the age of 18. Further, we recommend that the South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT), the South Dakota Department of Education (SDDOE) and the South Dakota Safety Council (SDSC) administrators work together to adopt a



standardized, nationally recognized curriculum and end-of-course student, instructor, and course evaluations. We believe various interests in the state can be met by adopting the American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association (ADTSEA) curriculum. In our opinion this would be the best choice because the ADTSEA curriculum can be adapted by driver education instructors who teach outside of the public education system to comply with National Safety Council driver education course requirements. Further, we recommend that the state invite ADTSEA trainers to come to South Dakota to assist with implementation training and technical assistance for driver education instructors and that these training sessions be counted for continuing education credit for certification, as needed.

#### **1.5.2 Increase certification requirements for driver education instructors in South Dakota**

We recommend that administrators from collaborating agencies/organizations work together to increase the certification requirements for driver education instructors. We believe that three credits of continuing education should be earned for every five years of certification. This will increase the likelihood that driver education instructors in the state of South Dakota have contemporary knowledge and training in the selected curriculum, including curriculum changes that have been advanced by the American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association (ADTSEA) or other standardized curriculum selected.

#### **1.5.3 Increase minimum age requirements for permitting, intermediate licensing and full South Dakota driver licenses**

We recommend that SDDOT seek legislation, in concert with legislative and executive leaders in South Dakota, to increase the minimum age at which a young driver can acquire a permit, intermediate and full license. Our research shows that appropriate ages for these driving privileges should be 15 years for a permit, 15 years and 6 months for an intermediate license and 17 for a full license.

#### **1.5.4 Increase restrictions for intermediate and full South Dakota driver licenses**

We recommend that SDDOT seek legislation, in concert with legislative and executive leaders in South Dakota, to increase the number of restrictions under South Dakota's intermediate licensing, or GDL system. The additional restrictions on the intermediate license include prohibiting intermediate license holders from driving with more than one teen passenger who is not a family member. We also recommend that South Dakota's intermediate license prohibit the use of cell phones and any texting or communication devices other than those needed for the safe operation of a motor vehicle. Lastly, we recommend that South Dakota's full license prohibit the use of any texting devices during the period of full licensure in the state. This does not include the use of cell phones during full licensing, but would restrict drivers from using the texting features of their cell phones while operating a motor vehicle in the state.

#### **1.5.5 Create an interagency task force**

We recommend that administrators from collaborating agencies/organizations work together in forming an interagency task force to support ongoing driver education and safety programs. This ongoing task force, referred to here as the Driver Education Task Force (DETF), is essential to the successful attainment of goals laid out in the next two recommendations. For example, it is expected that the DETF could play an important role in the creation of a private association for driver education instructors and for facilitating the data collection and dissemination needs to monitor the effectiveness of driver education programs.

#### **1.5.6 Support development of the former South Dakota Driver Education Association**

We recommend that the DETF provide financial and administrative support for the rebuilding of the South Dakota Driver Education Association (SDDEA). SDDEA was once quite active in providing coordination and information exchange benefits to programs that likely improved young driver safety

in the state. We feel strongly that ongoing collaborations between instructors and public agencies will improve information sharing and help develop and implement best practices over time.

#### **1.5.7 Regularly evaluate driver education and licensing programs**

We recommend that DETF support a long term data management platform for uploading, downloading, and analyzing data for ongoing performance evaluation. DETF should become the repository of data on whether individuals completed driver education, the type of driver education completed, the provider of driver education course work, detailed licensing data, driver history data, crash data, and accident severity data. More generally, DETF should facilitate access to the full range of information associated with young driver safety in the state.

This approach will facilitate effective program evaluation, which requires that data be consistently collected and analyzed in the same manner over time and throughout the state. This is essential to the scientific management of the programs we have recommended here. Without a rigorous approach to ongoing program evaluation, it will not be possible to properly administer driver education or licensing to produce substantial improvements in the state of South Dakota's young driver safety record.