

North Carolina  
**DRIVER EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN**

**Prepared For:**

The Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee  
and the Joint Legislative Program Evaluation Oversight Committee

**Prepared By:**

The Driver Education Advisory Committee  
State Board of Education  
Department of Public Instruction

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# Mission, Vision and Goals

## **MISSION:**

Develop, administer and implement a high quality Driver Education Program to ensure that all young drivers are provided with the necessary tools to allow them to safely and efficiently operate a motor vehicle on North Carolina's highways.

## **VISION:**

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, in cooperation with all stakeholders involved in Driver Education, will seek consensus in planning and implementing a Driver Education Program based on the needs of youth in North Carolina.

## **GOALS:**

- Promote adoption and implementation of the state Driver Education standards.
- Promote Driver Education teacher/instructor training and credentialing.
- Identify priority issues within the state Driver Education Program.
- Identify promising practices on how North Carolina may raise its general level of conformity with national standards.
- Determine the future needs in Driver Education and plan projects that will meet these needs.
- Coordinate with the driver licensing community and educate appropriate personnel within the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMVs) on all components of the strategic plan.
- Promote the strategic plan as inclusive for public / private / commercial schools.
- Develop, in addition to short term goals, 10 and 15 year horizon goals for Driver Education in North Carolina.

# Section One: Introduction

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### FUNDING OF THE PROGRAM

North Carolina is the only state that funds its Driver Education Program from the Highway Fund without any dedicated revenue source. Four states fund their programs through the general fund. Other states fund their programs through various dedicated revenue sources, such as driver's license fees, license plate fees, surcharge on vehicle insurance premiums, and petroleum revenues. Some additional ways of funding a state's Driver Education Program could include matching assessments by local government (counties and/or municipalities) to supplement the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) Driver Education flow through allocations, from general highway fund and a fee added to traffic citations by the court system. While any of these options may be feasible ways for North Carolina to fund the state's Driver Education Program, it may be more practical to use a combination of these options to fund the Program.

### **BACKGROUND (NORTH CAROLINA)**

Driver Education in NC is locally controlled by each of 115 LEA's ("Local Education Agency" or in layman's terms – local school system). Collectively, the state has approximately 120,000 students annually who become eligible to take Driver Education. Of that eligible number, about 92% of the state's teens are actually taught to drive – last year numbers were around 110,000. Driver Education in NC is required for anyone seeking a license under the age of 18. All students are eligible at age 14 years 6 months to take our course.

Up until last fiscal year, Driver Education in NC was fully funded by the state. This year, after state funding cuts, students may be required to pay up to \$45.00, depending on whether or not their county is willing to absorb the cuts in funding.

In 2010, as a result of legislative requirements, the Driver Education Program in North Carolina was reviewed from an accountability and management perspective. As part of the review process, there were two separate reports produced; The North Carolina Accountability Report (NCAR) and a more thorough, in-depth report by the North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM). The findings of both of these initiatives identified areas of improvements within the current Driver Education Program that should be incorporated into the Strategic Plan. Both of these reports identified the lack of a Strategic Plan for Driver Education as being a concern, and these findings led to a legislative requirement for DPI to develop a Strategic Plan. This newly developed Strategic Plan will address the concerns raised within both reports as well as provide guidance to assist with further development and strengthening of the existing Driver Education Program within the state.

### STANDARDIZED CURRICULUM

An on-going common recommendation from all of the experts was for North Carolina to implement a standardized curriculum. This was accomplished in March of 2011, and Revised

July 2011, and has been put in place for the current school year. This process should be monitored, evaluated and revised as needed in the coming years. As part of the standardized curriculum, consideration should also be given to increasing the amount of both classroom and behind the wheel time from the current 30 hours (classroom) and 6 hours (behind the wheel). These current time allotments are consistent with the First National Conference on High School Driver Education (held in 1949) which recommended a Driver Education course of 30 hours of classroom and six hours of behind the wheel driving instruction. Much has changed over the last 60 years with increased highway traffic and changes in vehicle technology, highway design, and traffic and highway regulations. Yet, North Carolina and other states' Driver Education curriculum still require 30 hours of classroom and six hours of behind the wheel instruction. Some national Driver Education organizations' standards recommend more classroom and driving time than 30 classroom hours and six behind the wheel driving instructional hours. For example, the American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association (ADTSEA) – National Curriculum Standards – requires 45 hours of classroom instruction and 8 hours of behind the wheel instruction. Similarly, the Novice Teen Driver Education and Training Administrative Standards (NTDETAS) requires 45 hours of classroom, 10 hours of in-car observation, and 10 hours of behind the wheel instruction

### INSTRUCTOR QUALIFICATIONS

Quality Driver Education instructor training is the backbone of a good Driver Education Program. Instructors should be required to complete approved standard instructor training that applies to all public and private Driver Education Programs, and include courses on theory and practice for classroom and in-car instruction for classroom skills, driver task analysis, and vehicle operational and instructional skills. Driver Education instructors in North Carolina generally receive their Driver Education credentials from:

DPI has an add-on certification based on successfully completing 12 semester hours of college-level course work at East Carolina University,  
DMV (a two-week, 80-hour course that focuses on understanding key Driver Education concepts), or  
Commercial driving schools (similar to the DMV course, except the courses are taught by DMV certified instructors employed by the commercial schools).

DMV officials believe that all Driver Education instructors should be certified to teach Driver Education. At the national level, the trend is toward increased standardization of Driver Education instructor training and certification requirements. For example, the ADTSEA launched a National Driver Education Teacher Certification and Recognition Program in 1998. The goals of ADTSEA's program are to improve the quality of Driver Education teachers, standardize their training, update professional knowledge and skills, and make Driver Education teacher training more available, nationally. To become certified under the ADTSEA program, Driver Education instructors must complete three college-level core courses plus an elective course, and have one year of verifiable teaching experience. This course of study is similar to the Driver Education Certification Program at East Carolina University's Department of Health Education and Promotion, which includes 12 semester hours of Driver Education. The East Carolina program enables certified teachers to add a Driver Education certification to their regular teaching certification. Nationally, a number of states including Indiana, Washington, and

Oregon have made strides in standardizing their Driver Education certification requirements for public and commercial instructors. DMV offers an 80 hour Driver Education instructor training course for commercial driving school instructors and LEA Driver Education instructors. General Statutes 20-322 through 20-325 require DMV to test, certify, and monitor driving instructors for commercial driving schools. Further, these instructors must be observed in the classroom and behind the wheel by the DMV staff within 90 days after completing the course, and passing the final exam before they are certified Driver Education instructors. The commercial driving school instructors must also receive 64 hours of continuing education credits every 4 years. As of September 2010, DMV was monitoring 69 commercial Driver Education schools and 808 certified commercial Driver Education instructors. In contrast, LEA driving instructors are not monitored by DMV or DPI once they complete DMV's driver training course or any other driving courses. Further, the LEA instructors are not required to take any continuing education credits to maintain their driving instructor certifications. The LEAs that responded to OSBM's survey reported that they employed 1,608 Driver Education instructors as of October 2010.

### PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Increased and mandatory parental involvement is another area that could greatly improve the overall quality of Driver Education. Parents have the ultimate responsibility for allowing their child to have/earn the privilege of driving. Unfortunately, in today's fast paced environment, parents are often too quick to ensure that their children get their driver's license so that they can become more independent, as well as, relieve a burden from the parents of constantly having to transport them or their siblings. Parents need to be made aware of the dangers and challenges their inexperienced driver is facing, and accept the responsibility of taking a more proactive role in the learning experience.

## **NORTH CAROLINA ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT**

The North Carolina Accountability Report (NCAR) completed in November 2010, assessed four main sections of the Driver Education Program: 1) Program Purpose and Design, 2) Strategic Planning, 3) Program Management and 4) Program Results and Accountability. The highlights of the findings for each section are as follows:

### **Section 1. Program Purpose and Design**

The Driver Education Program is documented in Statutes and funded from the highway maintenance fund. DPI, although required by G.S. 20.88.1 to organize and administer the Driver Education Program has adopted a limited role as “Fiscal Agent” in the program administration and implementation. The bulk of the program design, content and oversight has been delegated to Local Education Agency (LEAs) instead of maintained centrally at the state level.

### **Section 2. Strategic Planning**

At the present, no strategic plan has been developed for Driver Education, which should include long-term goals and/or the establishment of associated targets. Prior to these two reports, there had been no independent review of the program. There is no proactive forecasting process for budgeting and finally, the LEAs have been given responsibility for individual Driver Education Programs. This has the potential to lead to a fragmented program at the state level since there is currently no central oversight of the LEAs.

### **Section 3. Program Management**

The DPI has only a limited role in the development and administration of the Driver Education process, serving primarily as the “fiscal agent.” There is no strategic plan for Driver Education. The LEAs are responsible for the development, administration and all oversight of the Driver Education Programs.

### **Section 4. Program Results and Accountability**

The identified deficiencies in this area include: currently no programmatic goals or metrics have been established; no standardized driver training program exists; no technical oversight is conducted of the programs and there is limited funding oversight being done.

## **OSBM REPORT**

The management review report completed by OSBM reviewed the funding and efficiency of the Driver Education Program to : 1) examine the current process used by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), to distribute funds to local school agencies (LEAs) and the reversion of unused funds; 2) determine the most appropriate funding sources to support the Program; 3) collect data on the number of students served and the outcomes by the Program; 4) identify ways to improve services, reduce cost, and eliminate duplication; and 5) work with to establish performance measures for the program to determine the program's effectiveness.

Currently, there are a number of key areas that need to be addressed successfully in order to improve the Driver Education Program in North Carolina. This will help provide new drivers with the best foundation possible to become better drivers and better prepare them for the future challenges. The major areas of focus to be addressed in the remainder of this Plan include:



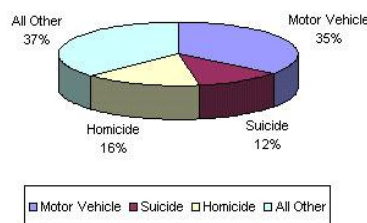
- 1) Administration of the Program
- 2) Oversight of the Program
- 3) Funding of the Program
- 4) Standardized Curriculum
- 5) Instructor Qualifications
- 6) Driver Licensing
- 7) Parental Involvement
- 8) Other Program Improvements
- 9) Performance Measures

## NATIONAL SCOPE AND HISTORY OF DRIVER EDUCATION

### SCOPE OF THE PROGRAM

Motor vehicle crashes continue to be the leading cause of death among American teens, accounting for more than one third of all deaths of 15 to 20-year olds. Teens continue to be over-represented in fatal crashes compared to all age groups. The crash rate is greatest among 16-year olds, who have the most limited driving experience and an immaturity level that often results in risk-taking behind-the-wheel.<sup>1</sup>

**Leading Causes of Death for Teens**



Younger drivers are frequently inexperienced in hazard recognition and often take unnecessary risks due to a combination of poor decision making and an illusion of invulnerability. Younger drivers do not always consider the consequences of their actions. Recent research in adolescent development supports the contention that younger people are often developmentally less capable of making sound judgments and decisions regarding potentially risky behavior. Areas of the brain involved in rendering judgments and making decisions are not fully developed until around age 25. Young drivers are particularly vulnerable to certain high-risk driving situations, such as driving at night, after drinking alcohol, with other teenage passengers, and when unbelted.<sup>2</sup>

Many approaches have been taken to reduce teen driver crashes. These include laws and sanctions, licensing programs, and Driver Education. Driver Education remains a standard for acquiring driving skills and 29 states require the completion of a Driver Education Program before a person under the age of 18 can apply for a license.<sup>3</sup>

### HISTORY AND CURRENT STATUS OF DRIVER EDUCATION

In North America the term *Driver Education* has usually been applied to programs for beginning drivers consisting of both “theory” instruction in the classroom and practical training in a vehicle. Traditional programs have taken place in a single stage, before the driver becomes licensed. Indeed, one principal purpose of Driver Education is to prepare beginners for license testing.

<sup>1</sup> Novice Teen Driver Education and Training Administrative Standards

<sup>2</sup> Compton, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Compton, 2008 and NHTSA 2011 Traffic Tech: Driver Education Practices in Selected States, Number 404

Driver Education has long been mandated to address all possible aspects of the tragically high crash risk of young novice drivers. Courses for beginners have long been a popular and convenient means of achieving independent mobility, important for both young people and their parents. Driver Education has strong “face validity” as a safety measure. Parents think it makes their children safer drivers.

#### NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION - NHTSA

The U.S. Department of Transportation, through NHTSA, has helped to guide Driver Education nationwide. These efforts have been numerous.

Recently, David Strickland, Administrator, NHTSA, expressed his agency’s views on Driver Education in a letter to Teen Safety Advocates<sup>4</sup>. The following are direct quotes from Administrator Strickland:

Motor vehicle crashes not only harm individuals, they also impact the economy. Among other costs, the expense of health care interventions, vehicle repairs, public safety personnel response, traffic congestion and increased insurance premiums are avoided if a crash never occurs. Starting a new driver on a life-long career of safe driving can have an immediate and long-term financial impact.

I firmly believe that an effective Driver Education Program – along with proven safety legislation, active law enforcement and positive engagement of parents, schools and other community members – is an important element in a program to protect these young drivers. Over the past several years, the NHTSA has supported the development of several products designed to improve the quality of Driver Education provided to novice drivers. This includes the development of;

- 1) Curriculum standards that outline WHAT should be taught;
- 2) Model curricula that demonstrate HOW it can be taught; and
- 3) Administrative standards that outline HOW Driver Education should be delivered.

Driver Education is a key part of the comprehensive approach needed to reduce tragic young driver crashes and their toll on our economy. I encourage each State to examine its youth crash and fatality data, determine what countermeasures are appropriate, support a strong GDL program and work toward implementation of a Driver Education Program, following the guidance outlined in the national curriculum and administrative standards.

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<sup>4</sup> NHTSA, letter sent to all Highway Safety Advocates, 1 March 2012.

## Section Two: Plan Recommendations

### WAYS TO IMPROVE THE STATE DRIVER EDUCATION PROGRAM

One of the most meaningful improvements which can be made to the Driver Education Program is to have a more consistent statewide program. Consistency will ensure students are receiving the same quality Driver Education regardless of where they reside in North Carolina. The areas of the program which can be improved include management and oversight, standardized curriculum, instructor qualifications, technology use, parental involvement, and coordination among State and local agencies.

### PROGRAM OWNERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY

Although DPI is legislatively charged with the administration and organization of the program, they have delegated nearly all of these responsibilities to each of the 115 LEAs. In turn, this has led to a number of challenges and different ways in which the program is administered, thus fragmenting the process and often providing various levels of program deliverables, depending on where it is being taught in the state. The quality and nature of the Driver Education Program should be the same for all students regardless of geographic location. As a further example of the fragmentation that turning over the program to the LEAs causes, the study by OSBM found that within the LEAs, there were four primary ways in which the program was being delivered to students. (In-House by LEA, Contractor, Instruction Contracted and LEA Provided Vehicles and Supplies, and Combination of Contractor and LEA were the delivery methods.)

In order to have a successful program, Driver Education needs to be the sole responsibility of one agency that is responsible for the organization and administration of the program. According to General Statutes (GS) 20-88.1, GS 115C-215, and GS 115C-216, the responsibility lies with the State Board of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction. The specific requirements of these statutes are:

*GS 20-88.1 requires expenses incurred by the State in carrying out the provisions of the Driver Education Program administered by the Department of Public Instruction in accordance with GS 115C-215 shall be paid out of the Highway Fund based on an annual appropriation by the General Assembly.*

*GS 115C-215 requires the State Board of Education to approve criteria and standards for the State Driver Education Program,*

*GS 115C-215 requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction to organize and administer a Driver Education Program that is offered in the public schools of North Carolina,*

*GS 115C-215 requires the State Board of Education to adopt rules to permit local boards of education to enter into contracts with private entities to provide Driver Education training,*

*GS 115C-216 requires the State Board of Education and local boards of education to provide a course of training and instruction in the operation of motor vehicles.*

# Section Three: Plan Action Steps

## 1. ADMINISTRATION OF THE PROGRAM

- **One governing body for Driver Education**
  - There should be one agency in charge of oversight of all Driver Education activities within the state. The likely agency for this would be DPI. This agency would be responsible for all facets of the program: who can teach, what they teach, oversight of the program, accountability of the program, and associated responsibilities.
  - Driver Education should be administered by DPI. (*Note: This is already established by State law and DPI needs to take a more active role in the administration of the State Driver Education Program.*)
  - Based on National Novice Teen Driver Education Standard recommendations, DPI should create a permanent position to oversee Driver Education and hire a State Driver Education Administrator. DPI should assemble an Advisory Committee of interested stakeholders to advise this State Administrator.
  - A Driver Education Advisory Committee should be supported to assist and advise DPI on the overall management and improvement of Driver Education. This Advisory Committee should consist of state level members from DPI, DMV, DOT, GHSP and local members from county school systems, local program administrators and teachers.

## 2. OVERSIGHT OF THE PROGRAM

- **Accountability procedures**
  - Audit/Monitoring process with personnel from the state level initiated to assure that funding/procedures are within guidelines for Driver Education.
  - Driver Education instructors would be required to be evaluated a minimum of 2 times a year both classroom and behind-the-wheel. This evaluation is done at the local level and submitted to the state based on state criteria.
  - To ensure adequate program participation, compare the number of program participants to the projected number of eligible students.
  - To measure program success in receiving a driver's license, compare the number of eligible students to the number of successful license applicants as reported by the Division of Motor Vehicles.

### **3. FUNDING OF THE PROGRAM**

- **Explore funding options as outlined in the OSBM report**
  - Having a program with dedicated funding would ensure continuation of the Driver Education Program.
  - Also, the funding sources listed within the OSBM report would provide additional funding above what is currently allocated from the Highway Trust Fund and would allow for the expansion of the Driver Education Program.

### **4. STANDARDIZED CURRICULUM**

- **There should be a statewide, mandated Driver Education Curriculum**
  - Curriculum standards should be required for both the classroom phase and behind-the-wheel phase of Driver Education. These standards should be based on the ADTSEA national curriculum standards.
  - Any online Driver Education should be approved and administered by DPI in conjunction with the local LEA and should meet the requirements of the state adopted standard curriculum.
- **All student drivers would be taught from the same curriculum.**
  - Have an approved textbook list for the state and recommend that counties purchase and use textbooks
  - Distributed learning/instructional guides for both phases (classroom and behind the wheel).
- **Increase required classroom hours**
  - From 30 hours to 45 hours with appropriate increase in funding.
  - Set the recommended number of classroom hours taught per day at 2 hours.
  - Establish a recommended number of students in a classroom (30).
- **Topics to be covered**
  - Highway safety concerns to include specific and consistent messaging on safety belts, alcohol, speed, and distracted driving.
  - Anger management, stress management, time management should be emphasized in the classroom.
  - Address other topics as illustrated through analyses of historical crash data.
  - Meet all curriculum content standards identified in the NTDETAS (ADTSEA Content Standards).

- **Increase required behind-the-wheel hours**
  - Increase BTW hours from 6 hours to 8 hours for each student with an appropriate increase in funding.
  - Set the recommended number of behind-the-wheel hours taught per day at 1.5 hours per student; recommend changing drivers every 30 minutes.
  - Establish a maximum number of students per session of behind the wheel instruction (no less than 2 students and no more than 3 students).

## **5. INSTRUCTOR QUALIFICATIONS**

- **Driver Education instructors**
  - Establish stricter certification requirements.
  - Commercial schools that contract with school systems would have to be approved by DPI. Commercial school instructors would have to be approved by DPI through DMV School Bus and Traffic Safety.
- **Continuing education for instructors**
  - To keep their license active and current, a DPI licensed Driver Education teacher would have to obtain 7.5 renewal credits every 5 years with the same requirements as any other subject area.
  - A commercial Driver Education instructor would be required to obtain 75 credit hours in Driver Education instruction every 5 years.

## **6. DRIVER LICENSING**

- **Driver Education required for all “new” drivers**
  - This would include adults. Statistics demonstrate that drivers at any age (novice and novices) have a high crash rate for the first 6 months.
  - Implement mandatory Driver Education requirements for all new drivers regardless of age.
- **Graduated Driver Licensing improvements**
  - Increase Level II of the GDL restriction from 6 months to 12 months to keep extra passengers out of the vehicle.
  - Under the GDL program, levy additional penalties for violations including not wearing safety belts, instead of just extending the Level II phase for an additional six months.
  - Strict enforcement of existing laws in regard to young people, making these laws administrative where possible to reduce the burden on the courts. For example; if a young person is caught driving while intoxicated, immediately take their license administratively.

- **Link driving privileges to student performance**
  - Driving privileges in high school would be directly linked to both academic performance and general conduct.

## **7. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- **Increased parental involvement**
  - All student drivers would receive no less than 100 hours of documented, supervised home practice (parent/guardian) driving time prior to receiving their license to drive alone.
  - Required viewing/reading material for parents to help stress the importance of their role.
  - Provide all parents copies of the Student/Parent Guide that was endorsed by DPI and by the North Carolina Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association.
  - Ensure that parents understand they have the final word as to whether their teenager applies for and/or keeps a learner permit or driver license.
  - Required parent involvement component (orientation meeting/ending conference of student performance, and/or other such requirements)

## **8. OTHER PROGRAM IMPROVEMENTS**

- **Remove restrictions on day time teaching**
  - Allow Driver Education to be taught during the school day if approved by the local Board of Education.
- **Public awareness campaign ideas**
  - Development and dissemination of educational/information.
  - Explanation of graduated drivers licensing and the parent's role.
  - Stressing the importance, need and reasoning for Driver Education.
  - Increase exposure of the importance of safety to younger drivers and the dangers they face.

## **Section Four: Program Evaluation**

The DPI should petition the Highway Safety Office to request from NHTSA a State Assessment of Driver Education based on the NTDETAS.

Establish a timeline for defining agency responsibility for Driver Education and define all levels of monitoring Driver Education at the local level.

DPI should establish a permanent, full time position to serve as the coordinator for all Driver Education activities within the state. The position should be funded from current Driver Education appropriations.

Enforce the existing mandate of a state adopted and approved Driver Education curriculum based on national standards. Monitor compliance of this standard in all local programs.

Establish instructor training programs that meet the standards established by DPI, which are based on the NTDETAS. Ensure these training programs are available throughout the state of North Carolina.

Monitor driver licensing regulations and proposed legislation that ensures improved graduated driver licensing efforts.

Establish parent involvement regulations that increase the involvement of parents in the student learner process. Distribute these materials to all school and driver licensing agencies. Measure the compliance of these regulations using DPI audits.



## Section Five: Glossary

ADTSEA	American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association
DMV	Department of Motor Vehicles
DOT	Department of Transportation
DPI	Department of Public Instruction
DWI	Driving While Intoxicated
GDL	Graduated Driver License
GHSP	Governor's Highway Safety Program
LEA	Local Education Agency
NC	North Carolina
NCAR	North Carolina Accountability Report
NHTSA	National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
NTDETAS	Novice Teen Driver Education and Training Administrative Standards
OSBM	Office of State Budget and Management