

# **TEENAGE DRIVING STUDY**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Commissioned by**



**Washington State Legislature  
Joint Transportation Committee**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Washington Legislative Joint Transportation Committee contracted with René Ewing & Associates, LLC to conduct a study of programs and policies which are intended to reduce accidents involving teenage drivers to include: graduated driver's licensing, traffic safety education, restrictions and enforcement policies.

This executive summary is meant solely for the purpose of informing policy makers in the Washington State Legislature of the effectiveness of those policies and programs and to offer suggested best practices for future policy consideration.

## **BACKGROUND**

Two important facets of Washington State's current efforts to reduce accidents by teenage drivers are the intermediate license program and the traffic safety education program requirements. Washington implemented its intermediate license program in 2001 for drivers between sixteen and eighteen years of age. Under this program, holders of an intermediate license face restrictions on the hours in which they may operate a vehicle and the type and number of passengers that they have in the vehicle. These restrictions are lifted if the intermediate license holder is not involved in an accident, does not receive a traffic citation, and does not violate any of the intermediate license restrictions within twelve months of the issuance of the license.

Traffic safety education in Washington has undergone significant changes. The funding provided by Washington State for teenage traffic safety education was significantly reduced in the 2001-2003 biennium, causing many public schools to curtail or eliminate their traffic safety education programs. As a result the number of commercial driver training schools has expanded. The Department of Licensing is responsible for overseeing the operation of the commercial schools and setting the driver training school curriculum. The Office of the Superintendent for Public Instruction (OSPI) oversees the operation of public school driver training programs.

## **INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL STATISTICS**

### Globally

### approximately

• Total # people killed in traffic accidents in 2000	1.26 million
• Estimated # of deaths in traffic collisions in 2020	2.0 million
• Total # people injured on the roadways annually	50 million
• # people killed in a day on the roads	3000
• Global annual economic loss due to traffic crashes	\$518 billion

*(Based on World Bank & WHO estimates)*

### Nationally

- The leading cause of death for 16 to 20 year olds is motor vehicle accidents.
- A study of 16 year olds following licensure shows that the crash rate immediately following getting their license is three times greater during the first 1000 miles of driving as compared to the next 2000 to 3000 miles of driving.
- States that allow licensing at age 16 or earlier tend to have higher teen crash rates.
- Fatal crash rates for all age groups are higher at night and particularly for 16 - 17 year olds.
- Teen drivers with teenage passengers in the vehicle are twice as likely to be involved in a fatal crash as teen drivers traveling alone. When multiple teen passengers are in the car, the crash risk increases even more dramatically.
- Driving under the influence of alcohol or other substances is only one of the teen driving crash risk factors. Speed and following too close are actually higher risk factors for teen drivers.
- Approximately 450,000 teenagers are injured in vehicle accidents annually.

- New drivers tend to focus on the area just in front of the car and are concerned about their position in the driving lane. They are less likely to scan a wider range of view, glance at objects in their peripheral view and are not as likely to use the mirrors.
- A recent Johns Hopkins study showed that comprehensive graduated driver licensing programs yield about a 21 percent decline in 16 year old fatal crashes.
- In 2002, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimated the cost of 15-20 year-olds' crashes to be \$40.8 billion.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Lack of a systemic approach to preparing teenagers for driving safely is problematic at best. While there are bits and pieces of 'good stuff' in licensing, education, and enforcement, there is not a cohesive, integrated approach to preparing our young drivers for this responsibility.

This is an opportune time for policy makers to set the direction and support to create an outstanding program with the resources required to do it well. There is a continued interest by citizens to improve the safety of our highways and among Washington state agencies to improve our current teen driver programs.

The following is a summary of the research conducted and the recommendations to the legislature for consideration. These recommendations are listed in a sequence that mirrors the licensing process for young people and are not ranked by importance. See the full report for more comprehensive details.

### **LEARNER'S PERMIT STAGE**

*Current Washington state law allows a 15 year old to obtain a learner's permit if they are enrolled in a drivers' education program. Those not enrolled, may obtain a learner's permit at age 15 ½.*

Washington State's statutes are below the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety's (IIHS) recommended minimum age of 16 for obtaining a learner's permit.

A great deal of research indicates that maturity and experience are the two most critical factors in accident prevention. Neuroscience studies show that the human brain continues to develop until

the mid 20s, particularly in the regions of decision making and risk taking behaviors, two of the most critical risk factors for teenage drivers. Therefore waiting until age 16 to obtain a learner's permit will allow the opportunity for the young driver to be a little more mature.

Washington has no school attendance requirements for obtaining a learner's permit or intermediate license. Illinois recently passed legislation requiring school attendance or other form of academic standing in order for teenagers to have the privilege of driving.

Parental involvement in teenage driving is critical. Parents must know and understand the licensing laws and restrictions placed on their teenage driver, be adequately prepared to perform their role as coach and supporter of the concepts and learning taking place in driver

#### **Recommendation 1 - Learner's Stage**

- a. It is recommended that the age for obtaining a learner's permit be changed from 15 to 16 years old, regardless of whether the teenager is enrolled in a drivers' education program.
- b. It is recommended that in order to get a learner's permit or intermediate license, a driver under the age of 18 must be going to school or in a GED program, similar to the requirements in Illinois.
- c. It is recommended at the time a parent/guardian signs for a teenage driver's learning permit or intermediate license at the Department of Licensing, the parent/guardian continue to be given documentation outlining the restrictions, sign that they have received and read the restrictions, and be given a log book for recording their teenage driver's required supervised driving practice hours.

education programs, role model the driving behavior expected of teenage drivers, and enforce the legal requirements placed upon teenage drivers. Washington does not currently have a well defined structured approach for engaging parents productively in the driver training process.

A recent study demonstrated a lack of knowledge and understanding among Washington parents. Parents are not adequately informed of driving restrictions by the Department of Licensing when signing for their teenage driver's learner's permit or intermediate license. Driver education training providers are required to inform the parents of the requirements, but the study indicates an inadequacy in the current system.

## **GRADUATED DRIVER'S LICENSE**

In 1996, Florida was the first state to adopt a three-tiered graduated driver's licensing system. Since that time all but 5 states (AZ, AR, KS, MN, ND) have adopted similar programs. All the research indicates that Graduate Driver's License (GDL) programs as a whole are effective in reducing 16-year-old drivers' fatal collisions rates nationally.

The more comprehensive and restrictive programs appear to have had the most positive collision reduction outcomes. States with learner's permits, intermediate license, and restrictions on night driving and number of passengers have seen increased results. Researchers studying the collisions involving 16 year old drivers in Pennsylvania following implementation of the GDL system noted that the decrease of 27% between 1999 and 2000 was due largely to the night time driving restrictions imposed between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m.

The most effective GDL programs have the following characteristics:

- minimum time limits for the learner's permit stage,
- restricted hours of unsupervised driving in the intermediate stage
- restricted number of teenage passengers in the intermediate stage
- minimum age at which one can have a full license

If teenage vehicle fatalities are to be reduced further, a more stringent graduated driver's license program appears to be the most successful option available to policy makers. All research agrees the licensing laws need to have three phases:

- a learner's permit with required hours of behind-the-wheel training and a minimum holding period before receiving an intermediate license,
- an intermediate phase with passenger and night time restrictions
- then full licensure without restrictions.

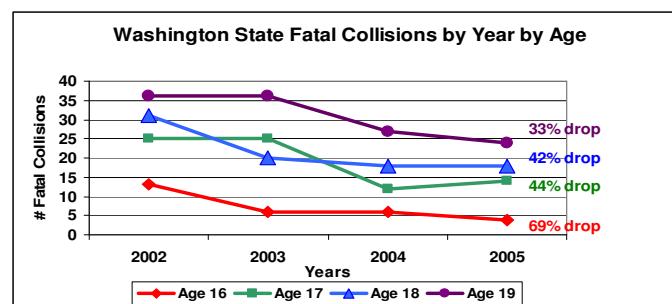
The best system sets:

- 16 as the minimum age for obtaining a learner's permit, and no less than six months driving with parent or guardian supervision with up to 50 hours of driving practice;
- an intermediate stage that extends to the age of 18 with restrictions on night driving hours and limits the number of teenage passengers (other than family members).

Since the implementation of Washington's intermediate licensing program in 2001, teenage fatalities have decreased 69% to 33% for drivers aged 16 to 19. In addition, there have been significant reductions in collision

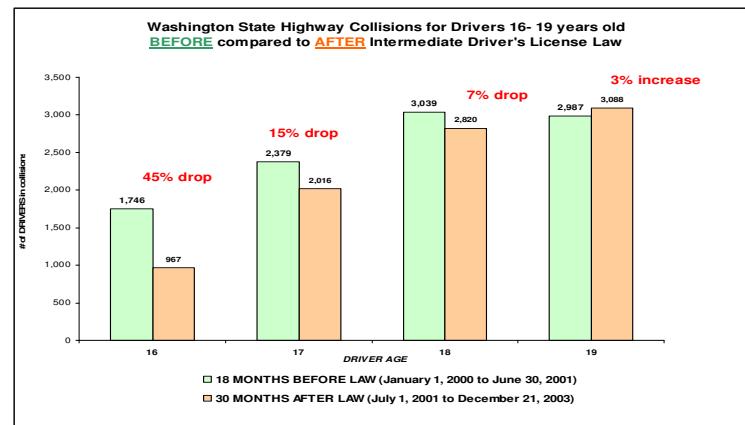
### **Recommendation 2 - Graduated Driver's License**

- a. It is recommended that the Washington State graduated licensing laws should remain in place and full consideration be given to expanding the restrictions to be in alignment with the national recommended standards.
- b. Night Time Driving Restrictions - It is recommended to extend the current driving restrictions from 1 am to 5 am be changed to 9 or 10 pm to 6 am.
- c. Passenger Restrictions- It is recommended to extend the prohibition of teenage passengers during the intermediate stage from the current first six months of licensure to the entire intermediate license stage.
- d. Violations and Sanctions- It is recommended that intermediate driver's licenses be suspended on the first violation for no less than 6 months and revoked upon the second violation until the age of 18.



for 16 year olds. However, Washington's restrictions on teenage drivers fall behind the recommended national standard from Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

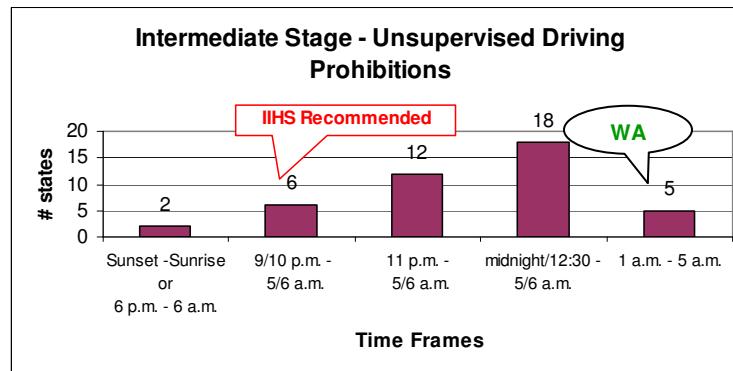
Research shows that stronger restrictions have the potential for saving the lives of teenagers, their passengers, and those who share the road with these young drivers, particularly the night time driving and passenger restrictions.



## NIGHT TIME DRIVING RESTRICTIONS

*Current Washington state law restricts intermediate drivers from driving at night from 1 to 5 a.m.*

Studies on the time of day and hours that accidents most often occurred for teenage drivers led to the establishment of driving curfews for teenage drivers in many states. In 2004 nationally, 18% of the fatalities of teens in motor vehicles occurred between 9 p.m. and midnight, 22% occurred between midnight and 6 a.m. and 54% of the deaths occurred on Friday or Saturday. Some of the causes for this high rate of fatalities are that this is typically the time of day when teens are driving for recreational purposes and often involves drinking with teenage passengers in the car.



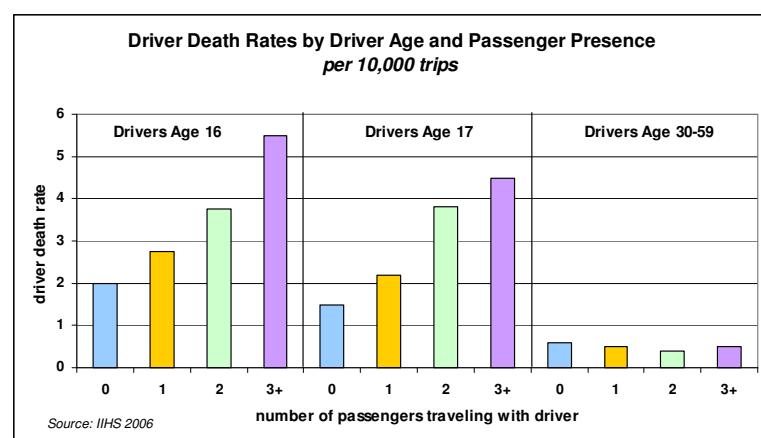
Recently published evidence shows that in states with a driving restriction that starts before midnight, there has been a 13% decrease in evening fatal crashes for 15 to 17 year old drivers.

National recommendations call for restricting night time driving from 9 or 10 p.m. to 5 or 6 a.m. At a minimum Washington should consider expanding the night time driving restrictions to be in line with the IIHS recommended restrictions to continue to reduce the number of fatalities.

## TEENAGE PASSENGER RESTRICTIONS

Consistently across studies of teenage drivers the presence of passengers, especially teenage passengers, increased the risk of collisions due to the distraction. The collision risk is 3 - 5 times higher for 16 and 17 year old drivers with 2 or more passengers in the car than when they are driving alone. In 2004 in the US, 62% of 16-19 year old passenger deaths occurred when another 16 - 19 year old was driving.

In a study conducted by the University of North Carolina, collision risk is increased by 39% for 16 year old drivers with one passenger and by 182% with 3 or more passengers. For 17 year olds, the



collision risk is increased by 48% for one passenger and by 207% for three or more passengers (University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center).

*Washington state law states that teenage drivers may not have any passengers under the age of 20 unless they are members of their immediate family during the first six months of the intermediate license period. After 6 months, they may carry up to 3 passengers under the age of 20.*

Given the above risk factors, Washington should extend its prohibition of teenage passengers throughout the intermediate license period. Increasing the stringency of passenger restrictions in Washington State could have major implications for reduced collisions involving young drivers.

## **VIOLATIONS AND SANCTIONS**

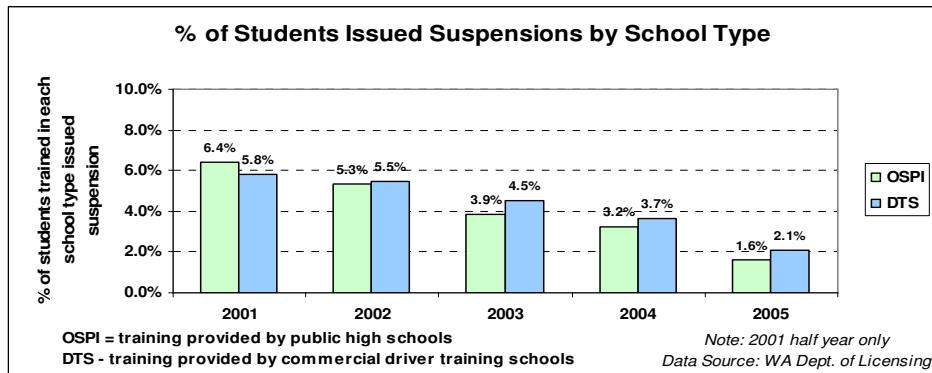
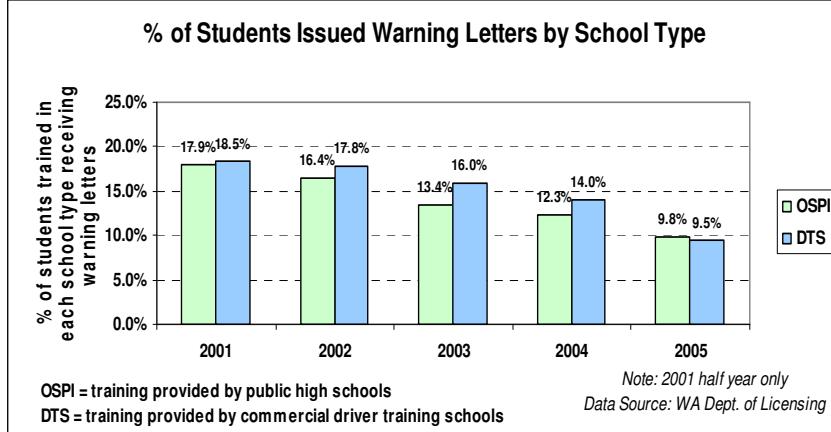
Currently in Washington, Department of Licensing sends a letter to the parent/guardian when a young driver has been cited for a first violation of the intermediate license restrictions, any other driving violation, or is in a collision. This is the only sanction action taken. There is no guarantee that the parent/guardian actually receives this letter. The letter is the only action for a first offense even though data shows that young drivers with violations are more likely to be killed or seriously injured in subsequent motor vehicle accidents.

For second offenses, the teenager's driving privileges are suspended for 6 months or until age 18, whichever is shorter. For three driving violations, their license is suspended until 18.

There is no indication that young drivers change their risky behaviors due to the current consequences for violating the restrictions of their intermediate license. A recent survey of teenage drivers in Washington indicated teenagers do not perceive Washington's sanctions for violations to be a deterrent to risky driving

behaviors. This coupled with data that indicates many parents are not aware of the driving restrictions and 16% openly admit they don't enforce them with their teenage drivers, points out the need to better inform and hold drivers accountable beyond just a letter.

As indicated in the above graph, since 2001, teenage drivers trained by commercial driving schools (DTS) or public schools (OSPI) have had almost identical results in the percentage of warning letters or suspension of licenses. It should be noted that this data includes one particular poor performing large commercial driving school in Pierce County that was recently sanctioned by the Department of Licensing to cease doing business for lack of compliance with current regulations.

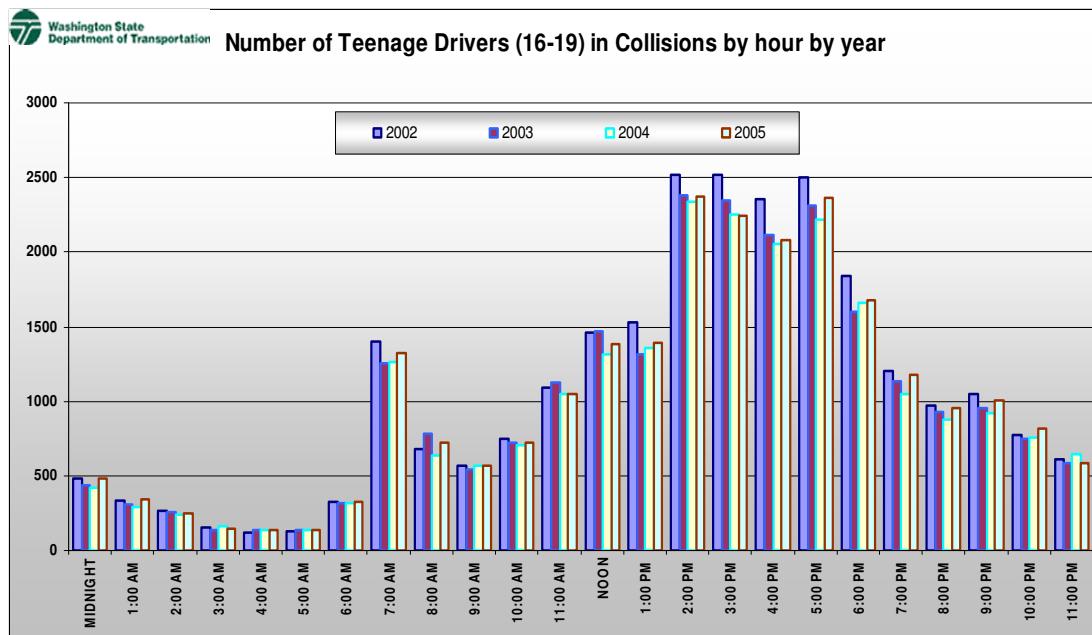


## SCHOOL HOURS

According to Washington State Department of Transportation data, most teenage driver collisions occur in October, November, and December. Most commonly, accidents happen on Fridays. The most common hours of the day for teenage collision is from 2-6 p.m. and secondarily from 7-8 in the morning. Not coincidentally, these are the hours before and after school and the times when a teenage driver is more likely have teenage passengers in the car.

### Recommendation 3 - School Hours

- a. It is recommended that serious consideration be given by school districts around the state to starting high school at 9 a.m. and ending at 4 p.m.
- b. It is recommended that high schools have a closed campus during lunch hour.



Some experts suggest that changing the hours of school could make an immediate impact on the number of collisions. In a recent University of Minnesota study on school start time, it was noted that the amount of sleep, time of day and circadian rhythms do play a part in how prepared a teenager is to learn. It is also true that despite their increased need for sleep, teenagers get less than they did as children. As they move through the teenage years, adolescents need increasing amounts of sleep. There are serious risks for adolescents when they are sleep deprived while they are behind-the-wheel. Having high school begin classes begin at 9 a.m. will allow teenagers to be more awake and alert when driving to school having had one or two more hours of sleep.

Changing the school end time to 4 p.m. would reduce the number of hours after school when students could be driving with passengers and without parental knowledge of their whereabouts. It should be noted that according to the FBI, the frequency of juvenile crime is about four times greater in the hours after school than during curfew hours. So decreasing the number of hours after school and before dinner time would have potentially even greater side effects than the reduction in traffic collisions for young drivers.

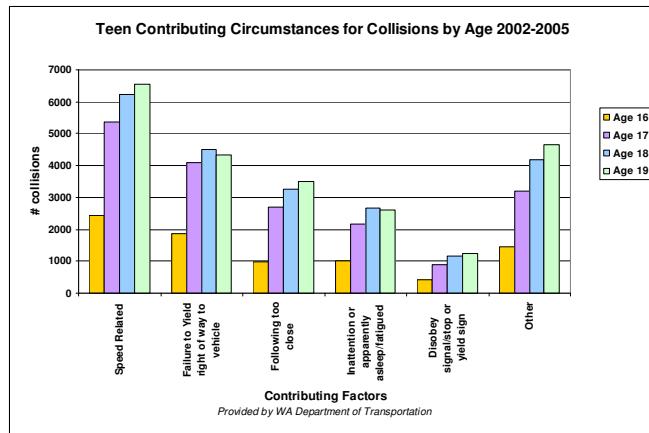
A study of three counties in North Carolina found that there was a higher rate of teenagers' motor vehicle crashes during the lunch hours in the two counties with open-campus lunch policies compared with the county without. It was noted that the students from the counties with open-campus lunch schools were carrying more passengers with them when they were involved in lunch hour crashes. Open campus lunch policies expose teenagers to additional driving time and encourage conditions in which multiple teens ride together, a known risk factor for crashes involving teen drivers.

## **ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR INTERMEDIATE LICENSE**

*Washington law requires a teenage driver complete 50 hours of supervised driving practice with someone who has been licensed for 5 years or more, including 10 hours at night to qualify for the intermediate license. These hours are in addition to the driving requirements for traffic safety education program participation.*

Currently parents/guardians have to sign a statement that they have provided the required number of supervised driving hours with their teenager. Department of Licensing is considering having parents/guardians complete and sign a log book documenting the number of supervised hours received by the teen driver when signing up for an intermediate license.

In Washington State, the top four contributing circumstances for teenage collisions are: speed,



### **Recommendation 4 - Additional Requirements of the Intermediate License**

- It is recommended the Department of Licensing implement using a signed log book documenting the number of supervised hours received by the teen driver.
- It is recommended to increase the number of supervised driving hours from 50 hours to 60 hours.

failure to yield right of way, following too close, and inattention, in that order. Requiring young drivers to have more behind-the-wheel experience under supervision will improve their ability to make better judgments about following, yielding and paying attention to surrounding conditions.

Increasing the number of hours will provide novice drivers with more experience in recognizing and developing the skills to overcome these contributing factors to collisions.

## **TRAFFIC SAFETY EDUCATION**

### **CURRICULUM**

There is no research data supporting that the current form of traffic safety curriculum has a demonstrable effect upon reducing teenage driving fatalities and collisions.

Currently, Washington traffic safety education programs vary in their approach to meeting the state requirements, depending on the provider type: commercial driving school or public school.

*Commercial driving school curriculum must include a total of 30 hours of classroom instruction, and a minimum of 6 hours of behind-the-wheel training. Public school program curriculum must include 30 hours of classroom instruction, and a minimum of 4 hours behind-the-wheel training.*

Neither provider type is required to have curriculum that is performance based nor tie the behind-the-wheel training time to "just learned" classroom training.

The most promising traffic safety education curriculum with demonstrated influence in teenage driving records is one that is performance based, such as the curriculum being used in Oregon. Their curriculum is based on risk analysis, decision making, and other factors that influence the teen driver rather than

### **Recommendation 5 - Traffic Safety Education**

- It is recommended that all driver education training curriculum must be consistently delivered throughout the state regardless of provider type.
- It is recommended that the oversight of traffic safety education, regardless of the provider, be given to one state agency. The inconsistency of having two separate and different delivery requirements and curricula and oversight by two different departments is problematic at best and detrimental to student drivers at worst. Currently, commercial driving schools are providing training to 3/4 of driver training students; therefore, it seems logical to consolidate program oversight under Department of Licensing.

just focusing on the basic driving skills. This performance based curriculum requirement would require that the traffic safety education providers certify that the student had met the learning objectives of the course and demonstrated competency in order to receive their certificate.

Drivers Education may help to reduce crashes by focusing on the initial "errors of inexperience" rather than trying to develop a "lifetime of responsible driving". Lack of driving experience is a major contributor to high crash rates for young drivers in the first few months of driving. Underlying many of the errors leading to accidents is failure to recognize a situation as hazardous.

The initial high rate of accidents immediately following licensure is attributable to errors of inexperience rather than high speed and irresponsible behavior. Other productive routes to fatality reduction have been through enforcement, vehicle design and occupant protection (seat belts and air bags) rather than the older standard driver education programs.

A study of accident reports shows the largest single category of error involves visual search (looking for the right things at the right time along the road ahead and to the side for cars and people who might enter the path, or behind when slowing, backing or changing lanes).

Next are attention errors (eyes pointed in the right direction but the mind is somewhere else - often a result of distraction or having to share attention among two or more situations.)

Third major category is speed - primarily not adjusting adequately to traffic or curves, slick surfaces and following too close.

The leading studies indicate the need for a two phased approach for traffic safety education. Phase one, similar to Washington State's, is the basics of handling the vehicle and basic mechanics of driving. Phase 2 is centered on decision making, risk evaluation, defensive driving and it teaches the young driver to observe the environment and the potential hazards. The second phase helps students learn consequences of their decisions and outcomes from their risky behavior such as speeding and following too close and moves beyond the mechanics of operating the vehicle in ideal conditions.

There are some highly recognized computer based programs that have been designed by AAA and others to aid in the classroom training of understanding the consequences of decisions.

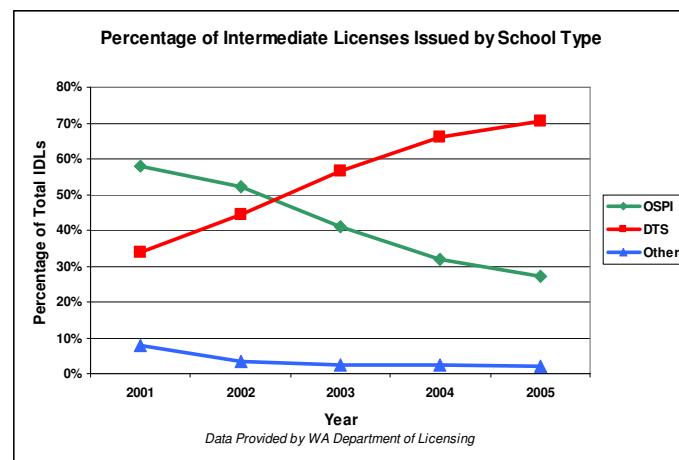
### **DELIVERY SOURCES**

Currently there are Driver Training Schools offered in 29 counties in Washington State. The following graph illustrates the number of Intermediate licenses issued by commercial driving schools, public school programs and out of state programs. It is apparent that the decrease in funding for public school programs has resulted in an increase in the number of commercial driving schools.

The inconsistency of program requirements and oversight between Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and commercial driving schools is well known in the industry. Though the Department of Licensing is revising the requirements for commercial driving schools in Washington Administrative Code, Office of

#### **Recommendation 5 - Traffic Safety Education (cont'd.)**

- d. It is recommended that if the oversight is consolidated, additional funding be provided to support DOL's additional oversight duties.
- e. It is recommended that an integrated curriculum of classroom time immediately followed by behind-the-wheel driving instruction that reinforces the classroom learning be mandated by all traffic safety education programs.



Superintendent of Public Instruction requirements have not yet been revised to be consistent with Department of Licensing.

Regardless of driver training provider type, oversight of inconsistent programs is problematic and should be consolidated under one organization to provide a more comprehensive approach to preparing teenagers to drive. OSPI is no longer funded for Traffic Safety Education nor is there dedicated full time staff for oversight. Since the Department of Licensing currently oversees ¾ of training providers, it is logical they be given this responsibility. Additional resources would be required to support the oversight of these additional programs.

A key to successful driver training is an integrated curriculum, where classroom learning is immediately followed by supervised behind-the-wheel time that reinforces the classroom learning. Department of Licensing will be developing performance based curriculum for commercial driving schools in 2007 and this curriculum should support this learning concept. Public school programs should also be required to provide this curriculum. It is recommended that the Department of Licensing collaboratively develop the new curriculum with professional educators from OSPI to benefit from their knowledge of successful teenage education strategies.

#### **Recommendation 6 - Parental Involvement**

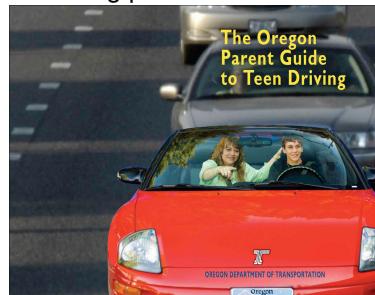
- a. It is recommended that a comprehensive strategy be developed by Department of Licensing to engage parents/guardians in the teen driving process such as adding the requirement for a signed parent/guardian log of hours supervised to be submitted to Department of Licensing at the time of licensing.
- b. It is recommended that the traffic education curriculum include at least one session with parent/guardian participation to ensure they understand their responsibilities and the driving restrictions during the intermediate licensing stage.
- c. It is recommended that Washington state traffic educators be required to supply a parental guide (in Spanish and English) to assist parents/guardians in supporting the curriculum similar to Oregon.

#### **PARENT/GUARDIAN INVOLVEMENT**

Research shows that engaging parents/guardians in the child's education yields better results, and traffic safety is no exception. Anecdotal information gained through our interviews indicates that many parents/guardians are unaware of the requirements of both traffic safety education and the intermediate drivers' license restrictions. Currently, driving instructors, whether public school or commercial, are expected to inform families of the restrictions imposed by the intermediate driver's license. Parental involvement with the traffic safety education program should require at a minimum parental understanding of these restrictions.

In the state of Oregon, parents/guardians are provided a step by step guide to help them reinforce the education being provided in the

classroom and behind-the-wheel, thus making them a reinforcing mentor for the student. This was patterned after a mentoring program in Australia which has proven to be very successful. Oregon's parent/guardian guide provides an outline for each lesson and tips for the parent/guardian to support the student's Traffic Safety Education lesson plan. It includes a log parents/guardians must sign for the practice hours. Department of Licensing is considering implementing a requirement for students to actually produce a log signed by parents/guardians showing the hours the teenager has driven to meet behind-the-wheel hour requirements in order to receive their intermediate license.



PEMCO Insurance commissioned an independent, statewide phone survey that asked Washington residents several questions about graduated licensing and other issues. Nearly one-quarter of Washington state residents are unaware of the Intermediate Driver's License law. And although parents/guardians of teen drivers have much greater awareness of the law, 16 percent of them don't enforce it.

Many parents/guardians – nearly 80 percent – enforce their own "house rules" for teen drivers aside from what the state requires. According to the PEMCO Northwest Insurance Poll, 16 percent of Washington parents/guardians enforce a curfew, requiring their children to be home by

a certain time. Approximately 12 percent require their teenagers to maintain good grades (typically described as a 3.0 grade-point average) to keep their driving privileges.

Other house rules included: no driving at night or in bad weather (9 percent of parents/guardians); can only drive to school or work (7 percent); parents/guardians must know where the kids are going and who they're with (6 percent); and kids must pay for their own gas, insurance, and repairs (4 percent). Some parents/guardians prohibit distractions such as eating or using cell phones while driving (4 percent).

Liberty Mutual Group conducted a national survey in conjunction with SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) that found teenage drivers were most influenced by the driving behavior of their parents/guardians. The survey asked parents and students about their driving behaviors. The following table shows correlation of the results of that survey where students indicated their driving behaviors were patterned after their parents/guardians' driving behavior.

	Student Behavior	Parent Behavior
Speeding	67%	48%
Cell phone use while driving	62%	62%
Non-use of seat belts	33%	31%

## **GRADUATED DRIVER'S LICENSE ENFORCEMENT**

One of the difficulties with the restrictions currently in place for intermediate drivers is the inability of law enforcement to stop a driver based solely on their young appearance for violating one of the intermediate license restrictions. Since the current law is only a secondary offense and not a primary, law enforcement can only cite a driver after they have broken another law. Though research shows that if teens follow the curfew and passenger restrictions they are less likely to be involved in an accident, law enforcement officers struggle to enforce these restrictions.

### **Recommendation 7 - Enforcement**

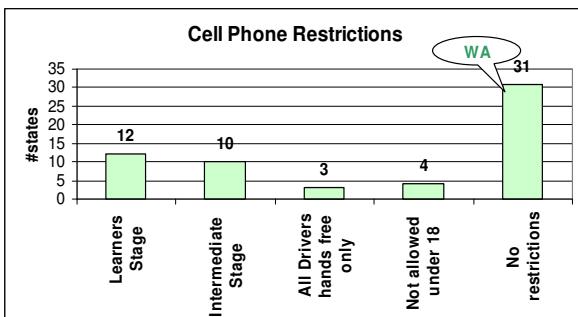
- a. It is recommended to change the intermediate drivers' license restriction violations from a secondary to primary offense.
- b. It is recommended to initiate a voluntary program for providing some vehicle marker (like those used for persons of disability) that indicates the driver is a novice with restrictions on nighttime driving and passengers.
- c. It is recommended that a statewide educational campaign similar to "Click It or Ticket" be funded to educate parents/guardians and the public about the teenage driving restrictions.

Several jurisdictions have been trying to find solutions to this profiling issue. Connecticut is currently experimenting with a program called *Young and Yellow* where parents/guardians are encouraged to put a yellow sticker on any vehicle their intermediate driver could be driving. This allows law enforcement the opportunity to enforce the restrictions as a primary offense. Forty-three states have some night time driving restrictions but 9 of them are secondary only. Thirty-six states have passenger restrictions but 10 of them are secondary offenses only.

Through our interviews we found that the Washington State Patrol in particular will always cite a young driver for violating one of the restrictions when they have been pulled over for another offense. Young people we interviewed indicated that they believe there are no consequences for violating these night time and passenger restrictions. We were told stories of how a young driver with a passenger was cited then called home and given permission to bring home the passenger and continue to drive in violation of the restrictions by their parents/guardians.

Law enforcement fully supports the restrictions and will enforce them when there is an opportunity but they acknowledge a need for education of the public and parents/guardians to support their enforcement efforts.

As this graph indicates a few states have recently enacted restrictions on cell phone use by teenagers while driving with a learner's permit or intermediate



license. Most of these restrictions have not been in place an adequate amount of time to prove the impact that these restrictions have on young drivers' accident rates. It should be noted that any distraction for a young driver is dangerous, whether it is another teenager in the car, talking on a cell phone, playing with the CD changer or putting on make-up.

## **POLICY OVERSIGHT**

Preventing teenage fatalities and injuries due to vehicle accidents is a multi-faceted problem that spans across state and local agencies, parents, and other stakeholders. No one group or organization alone can resolve this threat to our youth. A systemic approach needs to be taken that includes stakeholders from all of these multiple interest groups to solve this systemic problem. Research and data continues to be released almost monthly on this subject. Therefore, it would be wise to continue to monitor this field of study for new innovations and policy recommendations. An oversight group would provide a forum for working through these complex issues and making recommendations to policy makers and agencies for improvements.

In the near future teenage driving programs and issues will be the subject of other Washington state agency studies. These studies should provide further insight into policy issues for the legislature to consider along with these recommendations.

### **Recommendation 8 - Oversight**

It is recommended that an oversight group of stakeholders and citizens be established to ensure a consistent integrated program with participants from Department of Licensing, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, commercial driving schools, insurance companies, parents/ guardians, and other interested stakeholders.

## **CONCLUSION**

Washington teenage driver fatalities and collisions are a systemic problem that requires a multi-faceted solution. The aforementioned recommendations taken together, rather than as individual pieces, could have an enormous impact:

- Waiting until 16 to get a Learner's Permit makes them a little more mature before starting to drive
- Having to have more hours behind-the-wheel gives them more experience
- Increasing the restriction on teenage passengers until 18 reduces one of the biggest distractions for a new driver
- Having the parents more involved in the learning increases the chances of helping parents to enforce the rules
- Having the night time driving and passenger restrictions a primary offense allows law enforcement to provide consequences for breaking the law
- Having school start a couple hours later increases the chances that the teen is more awake and alert while driving to school
- Closing the high school campus at lunch time removes one more opportunity for teens to be in a car together and involved in a collision
- Having school go until 4:00 cuts in half the number of hours after school when teens could be driving around together before dinner and get in an accident
- Having all the schools that teach traffic safety have the same regulations, curriculum expectations and accountability will ensure that all kids get the same classroom and behind-the-wheel training
- Funding the Department of Licensing to adequately monitor, audit and inspect all driver education programs will go a long way to begin to improve the quality of those programs
- Creating a campaign to educate parents, family and the public on the restrictions on young drivers will allow the community to help to reinforce those rules.

The sum of these recommendations will result in the ultimate goal of reducing the number of injuries and deaths to teenage drivers, their passengers, those who share the road with them and to spare the families of the victims from living with the devastation of serious injury or death.