Young Drivers: A Study of Policies and Practices

(Report of Findings)

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RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were compiled from the wide range of findings gathered in the process of conducting this study. These recommendations emerged from the findings identified in the previous section of this report. For the ease of organization, the recommendations are organized using the same themes of the prior section. Recommendations are not necessarily linked to individual findings although this is often the case. Further, many of the recommendations will overlap with one another.

Theme 1 - Parents

Recommendation 1a - Initiatives should be prepared to help get parents up to date and knowledgeable about the influence they have with their sons and daughters regarding driving safety.

As cited in the findings, parents have a tremendous role to play with their sons/daughters; however, some of their knowledge and information is not current. Further, they could have a significantly greater amount of influence with their children about driving safety issues. Open communication with professionals, such as judges, police, attorneys, and traffic safety specialists, should be encouraged, not only during the time that a young person is being trained to drive but many years prior to that time. The role that parents have with appropriate safety modeling, whether with their use of safety belts, driving speed, driving style, or other interactions with the roadway, traffic conditions, and environment, should be highlighted. Further, parents should be encouraged to actively promote through positive reinforcement and modeling safe driving. This recommendation may be implemented through approaches such as media campaigns, web-based resources, print materials, and other strategies.

Recommendation 1b - Parents need to be more involved with substantive and quality time with their child's preparation as a driver.

This recommendation is based on the premise that the driving instruction process is best managed from multiple perspectives; that is, neither the formal preparation (whether in the school or in a private setting) nor the parent is the sole trainer for preparing the young person to drive. Substantive time must be spent by parents in working closely with their sons or daughters on driving related issues. Integral to this recommendation is preparation of a step-by-step guide which includes information and strategies on a variety of elements; these may include etiquettes of driving, handling the car, safety issues, logistics considerations, and other tips. Many parents currently do this by instinct and other parents leave the preparation to the formal setting. It is important that parents spend substantively more time and that this time be of a quality nature to assist their children in becoming safer drivers.

Recommendation 1c - Parents need to conduct more oversight activities with their children regarding driving.
Parents have an obligation to help reinforce the transitional nature of the young driver, particularly with the limited experience held by these youths. Parents have rights and obligations, and need to more actively enforce their standards, for promoting safe and considerate driving behavior. This recommendation includes being very specific with their children about the rules, standards, and guidelines of driving. Further, it includes the need to follow through on these standards. One specific element may include having the young driver have financial obligations to help with their own insurance, gasoline, car payments and/or other automobile related expenses. Another issue is to remind parents of their ability to have their child's driver's license suspended.

Theme 2 - The Youth Role

Recommendation 2a - Youth need to be involved in the process of decision-making regarding young driver issues.
This recommendation is based on the important role that youth can play in providing insight and input regarding content, processes, and standards surrounding young drivers. The current "disconnect" between many youth and the processes used to help prepare them as safe young drivers would benefit from their active involvement in a variety of ways. One role is to engage youth in an advisory role with the establishment of policies, protocols, and programs. Another is to have youth participate in focus groups to review and help modify curriculum and driver safety preparation processes. A third role is to engage youth in discussions to help program planners know better what is important to youth, what the nature of issues faced by them are, and other insights.

Theme 3 - Understanding Youth

Recommendation 3a - Professionals should incorporate current insights about the developmental processes faced by youth.
In the preparation of curriculum, training methodologies, educational programs, and sanctions, policy makers and professionals would benefit from a clear understanding of the developmental challenges and opportunities faced by youth. While much of this may be historical and standard for youth through time, other aspects may be emerging with new science-based insights regarding youth development. This should address youth development overall, as well as more specifically from a cognitive, social, emotional, and physical perspective.

Recommendation 3b - Program planners should continually strive to better address the inadequately developed skills and attitudes held by youth.
Since the overwhelming evidence is that youth lack experience, do not have developed skills, and have some attitudes that cause concern, ongoing attention to attempting to address this should be promoted. Some of this will be addressed through a prior recommendation regarding the parental role; other aspects of this will be promoted through helping youth understand ways in which they can

influence their peers, through their own behaviors, and interventions. The challenge through programs, policies, and training is to most effectively develop the skills, and in as appropriate way as possible, modify the attitudes of youth, particularly those of invincibility and a right of driving.

Recommendation 3c - Promote ongoing examination of the context of driving.
With the changing cultural and driving setting, it is important for Virginia planners and program personnel to consistently monitor the strategies used by other states and jurisdictions in addressing these issues. For example, with the emergence of cell phones and a greater incidence of aggressive driving, helpful strategies should be reviewed and examined for potential consideration in enhancing the state's initiatives.

Recommendation 3d - Continued emphasis must be maintained on issues such as drinking and driving and other risky individual behaviors.
While significant attention and progress has been made with drinking and driving and seatbelts, vigilance is warranted in continuing to address these risky behaviors. In addition, attention to emerging risky behaviors such as use of the cell phone, CD's, and speeding should be actively promoted. Increased education both through initial training programs as well as subsequent opportunities for later aged young drivers (those who have had their driver's license for several years) should be addressed.

Recommendation 3e - A positive reward system should be considered.
Not only should increased education be included, but young people may be more motivated by having positive reward systems to further enhance safe driving behavior. This may include a review of how points are used so that an individual can gain positive points or insurance reductions by no incidents or by participation in a supplemental young driver renewal program. There may also be other positive recognition that could help move young drivers to continued safe driving behavior. One example of this was recently cited in the London Times; with this proposed initiative, drivers between ages 17 and 25 who agree not to use their cars between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. would pay a much lower insurance premium. This is a type of self-monitored curfew approach being considered to help reduce crash rates, and hopefully insurance premiums overall.

Recommendation 3f - Program planners and policy makers must differentiate between the early young driver and the later stage young driver.
Based on the observed differential behaviors and attitudes found with these two clusters of individuals, the approaches should be different. The later stage young driver is often forgotten because the driver education has already occurred during the earliest days (ages 15, 16, and 17), however, this later stage young drive maintains a high (and sometimes higher) risk for safety concerns, and this should be acknowledged through programmatic considerations. This may include some incentives for re-education several years after obtaining a license, and it may include some education-based approaches with this later age group.

With this recommendation, programs and policies may well differentiate between the 15-, 16- and 17-year-olds (those who have just gained their driving license) and the 18-, 19- and 20-year-olds (those who have been driving for several years).

Theme 4 - Changes in Youth and Society

Recommendation 4a - A perspective of anticipating a changed driving setting should always be maintained.
With the context of driving being substantively different than decades ago, it is important for policy makers and program personnel to realize that new realities exist. Approaches and strategies that may have worked with youth decades ago may no longer work today. Of great benefit would be that those working with the issue today anticipate how things will be tomorrow and to look toward the change of tomorrow in an anticipatory rather than a reactive mode.

Recommendation 4b - Active attention must be implemented to promote the responsibility that individuals have regarding driving rather than the right that one has to drive.
Through the use of campaign slogans, materials, and approaches incorporated in the curriculum, the ongoing message about one's responsibility for driving should continually be emphasized. This is designed to stress the safety issues and to help counter the attitude that many hold about their "right" to drive. The implementation of this recommendation is supplemented by the important role that the parent plays. It can incorporate the emphasis on obtaining a set of accomplishments to address the opportunities surrounding driving.

Theme 5 - Driver Education

Recommendation 5a - Increased emphasis should be placed on hands-on driving skills.
This recommendation should be implemented both by the formal preparation approach (through the school setting or the private instruction approaches) as well as by the parent, as cited in an earlier recommendation. Young drivers should receive a significant amount of time of behind-the-wheel driving the automobile, both during the training activities, young drivers should be actively engaged in hands on approaches for safe driving through the use of simulators and other technological approaches. This will help in preparing youth for various situations they might encounter while they are driving.

Recommendation 5b - Driver education needs to be more practical.
The formal education process, whether in the school setting or through the private setting, should be increasingly practical and immediately useful in an applied way both immediately and on a long-term basis. This should include specific logistics, tips, strategies, and processes that will help the young driver be as safe as possible. It must be done in a way that speaks to youth; thus the incorporation of youth in the preparation and review processes, as cited above, is essential for the adequate

implementation of this recommendation. In short, driver education must "speak to youth" in an applied practical way.

Recommendation 5c - Defensive and offensive driving skills should be emphasized at a higher level.

In any training program, whether formal or with adult drivers, youth should be taught a variety of skills that are helpful in recognizing, interpreting, and analyzing appropriate safe ways of addressing these situations. These may be challenging situations faced on the highway, with the range of alternatives and appropriate approaches reviewed. Again, this process must be done in a way that speaks directly to the youth in an applied manner.

Recommendation 5d - Current technological approaches should be incorporated to the extent possible.

Consistent with other recommendations, it is important to use teaching, training, and practice approaches, which are relevant for youth. Through higher tech and lower cost technological approaches, this may be more readily incorporated than in years past. It is important to explore this process because many youth are highly conversant with technology and approaches that fail to incorporate cutting edge technology may be viewed as relatively unimportant by youth.

Recommendation 5e - The formal driver education curriculum should be prepared in a way that adapts to change and maintains its relevance and currency.

Not only should the process used with implementing the curriculum be modified to be more technologically based, but the content should be flexible enough to adapt readily to change which occurs in the surrounding society. With increasing insight regarding distracted driving, drowsy driving, and computer monitoring and GPS systems in automobiles, formal curriculum must be adjusted to account for the changes. One consideration may be to have the curriculum maintain a segment specifically for current and emerging issues. Inherent in this recommendation is a need for a monitoring system to ensure that the curriculum is up to date and adequately reflects what is currently occurring in surrounding society.

Recommendation 5f - Formal attention should be placed to reconcile the need for high quality education and the need for sound driver education.

With the increasing emphasis upon test scores and quality educational standards , there is an apparent tendency to reduce the emphasis upon the driver education in the school setting. At the same time, it is noted from the findings and other recommendations that it is important to have an increased emphasis on safety considerations and adequate preparation of young drivers. This attention should be addressed with a consideration of appropriate placement of driver education activities. The time allocated for driver's education should be maintained and not compromised with an increasing emphasis upon grades and academic performance. This emphasis may further reinforce the theme that a driver's license is not a right but a privilege that requires certain standards.

Theme 6 - Organization and Oversight

Recommendation 6a - A variety of agencies, organizations, and individuals should be involved in planning and reviewing the training and issues surrounding young drivers.
Since currently it is primarily several governmental agencies that are involved in the decision making process, a broader conceptualization of appropriate involvement is considered. Specifically, the thought should be moving beyond the traffic safety setting to other agencies and groups that could be helpful (such as health and substance abuse). In addition, it is important to think beyond government and look at other organizations with vested interest and potential influence; this includes insurance companies, work places, parents, and youth.

Recommendation 6b - A clearer definition of inter-organizational and intra-organizational communications is important to achieve consistency in driver education.
Currently two different state agencies are involved in the preparation, administration, and oversight of driver education: the Department of Motor Vehicles and the Department of Education. Since it appears that differences exist regarding how the curriculum is implemented as well as to how quality is maintained within each of these settings, it is important to examine carefully how greater consistency can be achieved with the preparation of young drivers. One approach may be to have one agency or oversight body with the overall authority for ensuring this consistency. Another may include some consolidation of functions so that there are not differential approaches being implemented.

Recommendation 6c – Attention should be paid to the role of commercial driver education services.
Based on the questions raised by a range of individuals regarding the commercial driver education services, this warrants additional review regarding their role, their oversight, and the implementation of their services. While this was reviewed nearly two years ago with a JLARC report (cited earlier in this Report of Findings), it warrants additional attention. This may simply be in the manner of more broadly communicating the findings generated with the previous report.

Recommendation 6d - Preparation and oversight of driver education instructors should be improved.
Based on the finding that the instructors of the driver education curriculum have no formal preparation, this should be examined carefully to determine their qualifications for teaching a course. These qualifications will be based on content knowledge as well as ways of best engaging the youth in their classroom setting. Similar to the tips inherent in helping a parent address their children in a more effective manner, this recommendation focuses on the preparation of the instructors. In addition to this element, the continued oversight and monitoring of the quality instruction should be

maintained. Some of this may come from the previous recommendation on on-site evaluation and others may be based on evaluation assessments gathered for each instructor and each course.

Recommendation 6e - A close on-site examination of the driver education instruction content and process should be implemented.
The implementation of this recommendation would include observations and evaluation of the processes, protocols, and content used with all modes of instruction. The aim is, as cited earlier, one of maintaining the greatest level of preparation for the young drivers. An emphasis with this examination would be an improvement in the nature and quality of instruction. Based on the previous recommendation, a specific focus may be warranted with the private companies. In addition, based on one of the findings a careful and specific examination should be conducted with the driver improvement program activity.

Theme 7 - Enforcement, Consistency, and Judicial Role

Recommendation 7a - Enforcement of laws about driving safety should be increased.
Numerous laws currently exist which promote driving safety. New laws are not recommended; however, this recommendation is focused on enforcing the laws that do currently exist. In particular, increased enforcement is recommended around the school setting. Also inherent in this recommendation is an acknowledgment of the important role that enforcement can play. Thus, young drivers in particular who are stopped for an infraction or violation should not be let off, but should be held responsible for the consequences of their behavior.

Recommendation 7b - Differential consequences should be considered for young drivers involved in a safety offense with an aggravating circumstance.
This recommendation suggests that should a young driver be involved in a violation in which other specific related issues are involved that compromise safety, a different or more serious sanction may result. For example, should alcohol be involved with a young driver, then a different and a more severe consequence may be warranted. Similarly, should a young driver be involved in an incident when a seat belt was not worn or when aggressive driving was documented, an additional consequence may be noted. This recommendation emphasizes the importance of these additional factors as substantial collaborators toward the unsafe behavior of the automobile. When linked to the inexperience and the attitude held by many youth, stronger sanctions may be particularly warranted.

Recommendation 7c - Judicial cases involving young drivers should be looked at individually.
Based on the fact that young drivers are involved with driving incidents at the beginning of their history, it is important that redirection of inappropriate and unsafe behavior be taken at the earliest possible moment. Judges are encouraged to take the time to review individual cases and make judgments based on individual circumstances. In particular, judges should not easily dismiss or undervalue the important role that they play with maintaining or promoting high standards for safety with the young driver.

Theme 8 - Perspective of the Graduated Drivers License

Recommendation 8a - Individual elements of the graduated drivers license initiative should be considered on their own merits.
Based on the finding that the graduated drivers license program is often viewed as a panacea, this is not necessarily a helpful approach for Virginia to adopt. In fact, as noted in the Findings section and with the results of the national survey, Virginia already has in place many of the recommended aspects of the graduated drivers licensing system. What is more appropriate for Virginia is to consider individual elements, typically included with graduated drivers license programs, individually. Each of these should be reviewed on their own merits and incorporated on an as-needed basis. The specific criteria for inclusion would be evaluation findings as well as what Virginia state policy makers believe is appropriate individually at the specific point in time. In addition, local jurisdictions may consider adopting specific programmatic elements based on their unique needs, such as is done with the allowable curfew legislation within the state. Specific items for consideration include nighttime driving, raising the driving age, parental supervision, and other youth in the vehicle. It should again be noted that, while the graduated drivers licensing system is often promoted, evaluation findings for the overall approach or for individual elements are extremely limited or non-existent.

Theme 9 - Urban and Rural Distinctions

Recommendation 9a - In any policy-making process, local distinctions must be made.
Based on the wide variety of settings faced by Virginia, policy making must take full account of the distinctions in urban and rural status. There must be a balance between the need for consistency statewide and unique needs based on type of setting. Some issues may be, just as is handled with the curfew process, best handled at the local level. Thus, when examining policy options, state policy makers are encouraged to examine appropriate relevance for all settings, as well as what is appropriate at the urban and rural environment.

Theme 10 - Need for Evaluation and Dissemination

Recommendation 10a - Evaluation systems, including outcome and process evaluations, should be actively implemented.
All programs involved with the driver education and licensing process should engage a specific evaluative component. This is appropriate for the driver education curriculum, for driver licensing, and for monitoring those who have had difficulties with their ability to drive safely. Outcome and process evaluation systems should be implemented which provide insight and feedback on the overall statewide processes, as well as at an individual level. Thus, with local concerns with a particular setting or particular instructor, modifications can be implemented at that level.

Recommendation 10b - Research and information gathering should be conducted to obtain insights about youth and current approaches in today's society.
On an ongoing basis, information should be gathered from what other states and jurisdictions are doing to address young driver safety issues. This will help Virginia continually monitor and improve upon the approaches being implemented, and it will further help in the ability to remain up to date with desirable strategies. In addition, this process keeps Virginia policy makers and program personnel up to date on issues of importance to youth so that the curriculum and policy approaches maintain their relevance with youth.

Recommendation 10c - Findings and research should be disseminated widely.
With the insights of research and experience gathered, these should be distributed to state policy makers, program personnel, course instructors, and even parents to the extent that is feasible and appropriate. Some issues are more important and relevant to policy makers while others may be particularly helpful for parents. Through the ongoing research and information gathering process identified in the previous recommendation, new insights and approaches can be identified; these should then be organized and prepared in a user-friendly way for the different constituencies.

Theme 11 Emerging Approaches

Recommendation 11a - The DMV should examine the variety of new approaches to assess their usefulness and applicability for the state.
With the variety of approaches and strategies identified through this process, consideration should be given to conducting a more thorough review and examination of these strategies. Some may be appropriate, and others may be useful if adopted. While this study was not designed to evaluate or assess this, but did identify some educational, training, and awareness efforts already implemented.