

OSBM

NORTH CAROLINA'S DRIVER EDUCATION PROGRAM

Management Review

As Directed by Session Law 2010-31, Section 28.2

November 2010



Prepared By:

Office of State Budget and Management

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INTRODUCTION

Scope of Study

Section 28.2 of Session Law 2010-31 directed the Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM) to review the funding and efficacy of the Driver Education Program¹ to: (1) examine the current process used by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to distribute funds to local school agencies (LEAs) and reverting 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 the DPI to establish performance measures for the program to determine the program's effectiveness. OSBM is directed to submit a final report with recommendations to the General Assembly by November 1, 2010.

Methodology

In order to conduct the study, the OSBM study team performed the following tasks:

- Reviewed North Carolina General Statutes and Administrative Codes applicable to the Driver Education Program,
- Determined the mission, goals, and objectives of the Program within DPI, the Department of Transportation (DOT), and the Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV),
- Determined the extent of coordination and collaboration between and among each of these agencies,
- Reviewed various reports performed by the Program Evaluation and Fiscal Research Divisions and various national organizations that are related to driver education,
- Interviewed employees from DPI, DOT, DMV, and selected LEAs that are responsible for some aspects of the Driver Education Program as well as representatives from national driver education organizations,
- Sent a survey to all LEAs relative to their individual driver education programs and analyzed the results of the survey responses, and
- Analyzed various other data.

There are a number of reports prepared by the Program Evaluation Division, Fiscal Research Division, and national organizations that have looked at various aspects of the North Carolina Driver Education Program and driver education programs throughout the United States. These reports contain numerous observations and recommendations regarding North Carolina's Program and driver education programs in general. OSBM has drawn from these reports in addressing the issues mandated by Section 28.2 of Session Law 2010-31. Ninety-one of the 115 LEAs responded to OSBM's survey. A summary of their responses are included in Appendix A.

BACKGROUND

According to General Statutes (GS) 20-88.1, GS 115C-215, and GS 115C-216, the State Board of Education and Superintendent of Public Instruction have primary responsibility for organizing and administering the State's Driver Education Program through the Public Schools of North Carolina. The specific requirements of these statutes are:

- GS 20-88.1 requires the State Board of Education to approve criteria and standards for the State Driver Education Program,
- GS 20-88.1 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 20-88.1 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-215 requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction to organize and administer a program of driver training and safety education in public schools, and
- 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.

¹ Hereafter, the State Driver Education Program will be referred to as the "Program".

While these General Statutes require the State Board of Education and the Superintendent, through DPI, to organize and administer the State’s Driver Education Program, DPI has delegated nearly all of the responsibilities for managing the Program to each of the 115 LEAs. For example, the State Board of Education Policy Manual, dated March 1, 2001, – 16 NCAC 6E.0301 Policy delineating driver education requirements – says that:

“In discharging their duty to provide a course of training and instruction in the operation of motor vehicles as set forth in GS 115C-216, local boards of education shall provide a program which meets the following standards and requirements...”

All of the 115 LEAs have established driver education programs, but their programs vary in the way in which the driver training is delivered to students. There are four types of Programs:

- Operated entirely by LEA managers and instructors,
- Contracted entirely with a commercial driving school,
- Contracted with a commercial driving school for classroom and driving instructions and the LEA purchases vehicles, vehicle related expenses, supplies, and materials, and
- Combination of LEA and commercial driving school providing the training.

The DMV has oversight responsibility for the instructors of commercial driver schools and limited oversight of the instructors for the LEA Programs as required by GS 20-320 through 20-328. Specifically, commercial driving school instructors must complete an 80 hour instructor training course to become certified driver education instructors for commercial driving schools. The DMV course is also available to LEA instructors, but not required. DMV is responsible for testing the eyesight of driver education students before they start the behind the wheel portion of driver education training.

RESULTS

Funding Process for the Driver Education Program

The State’s Driver Education Program is funded by appropriations from the DOT Highway Fund. The DOT, in turn, provides DPI a “credit balance” for the funds appropriated for the Program. DPI’s Finance Division then allocates funds for the Program to each of the State’s 115 LEAs based on an average daily membership of all ninth grade students in the public, charter, federal, and private schools within the geographical area of each LEA. DPI withholds \$15,000 of the funds to cover the cost of printing and distributing the Driver Eligibility Certificates for students that complete the driver education courses. In addition to operating and managing their respective programs, the LEAs are responsible for managing the funds allocated for driver’s education training. Table 1 shows the appropriations, average daily membership, and appropriated dollars per student for fiscal years 2008 through 2010. Eighteen of the LEAs that responded to OSBM’s survey reported spending \$504,808 of local funds for their driver education programs.

Table 1

Driver Education Funding for Fiscal Years 2008 through 2010

Fiscal Year	Appropriations	Average Daily Membership	Dollars per Student
2008	\$ 33,507,876	136,750	\$ 245.03
2009	\$ 34,286,309	139,477	\$ 245.82
2010	\$ 32,899,993	138,212	\$ 238.04
3-Year Average	\$ 33,564,726	138,146	\$ 242.96

Source: Department of Public Instruction

The 91 LEAs that responded to OSMB’s survey reported that an average of 83,478 students completed driver education during fiscal years 2008 through 2010. The average cost per student that completed driver education in the 91 Leas during this period was \$321.82, which is more than \$75 higher than DPI’s allocation rate of \$242.96 (averaged) for the same three fiscal years. The cost per student that completed driver education in the four types of programs ranged from \$265.93 for contractor only programs to \$354.10 for programs that used contractors for the classroom and driving instructions and the LEA providing vehicles, supplies, and materials. Table 2 on page 3 shows the number, the cost range, and average cost for each of the four types of programs.

Table 2
Cost Per Student that Completed Driver Education by Type of Program for Fiscal Years 2008 through 2010

Type of Program	Number of Programs	Percent of Programs	Average Cost Range	Average Cost
In-House by LEA	52	55.3%	\$183.98 - \$611.95	\$ 323.23
Contractor	21	22.3%	\$172.97 - \$369.65	\$ 265.93
Instruction Contracted and LEA Provided Vehicles & Supplies	12	12.8%	\$176.93 - \$598.00	\$ 354.10
Combination of Contractor & LEA	9	9.6%	\$252.42 - \$421.05	\$ 328.46
Total	94	100.0%	\$172.97 - \$611.95	\$ 321.82

Source: OSBM Survey of LEAs

As the LEAs incur driver education expenses for contractors, salaries, materials, supplies, and vehicles they request reimbursements from DPI. DPI, in turn, draws down the funds from DOT monthly. Since the appropriated driver education funds are not distributed by DOT until they are drawn down by DPI, the unspent funds at the end of the fiscal year

remain in DOT's Highway Fund. An average of \$1.8 million was unspent during fiscal years 2008 – 2010.

In the December – January timeframe DPI contacts all of the LEAs to determine whether they will have unspent driver education funds or need additional funds. The LEAs that need additional funds must prepare a justification which explains why the additional funds are needed. Using the information about unspent and additional funds, DPI redistributes the unspent funds in April to the LEAs that have requested and justified additional driver education funds.

DPI does not require the LEAs to submit any invoices or documentation to support the expenses for which they are claiming reimbursement. However, the budget codes associated with the expenditures must be allowable for the Program. DPI says that the monitoring of the driver education expenses is the responsibility of the LEAs and private auditing firms that they engage for their annual audits. DPI provides compliance supplements to the local audit firms that perform audits of the LEAs. Copies of the annual audit reports of the LEAs are submitted to DPI and are reviewed by the Monitoring and Compliance Section, of the Financial and Business Division. According to DPI, the local audit reports have not reported any significant findings in recent years relative to the improper expenditures of driver education funds. When the audit findings are identified about the driver education expenditures, they are referred to the Chief of the K-12 Curriculum, Instruction, and Technology Section. DOT financial officials expressed concerns about the apparent lack of monitoring by DPI of the LEAs driver education expenses. At a minimum, they believe that the reimbursement claims by the LEAs should provide some accounting for what and how the funds are spent. DPI considers the annual audits of the LEAs to be sufficient monitoring of their expenditures

Possible Funding Sources for North Carolina's Driver Education Program

North Carolina is one of eight states (16%) that fully fund their driver education programs. Of the other 42 states, 10 (20%) partially fund their programs and 32 (64%) do not fund their programs. Further, North Carolina is the only state that funds its 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 DPI driver education allocations, fee added to traffic citations by the court system, and payments by students' families.

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. Table 3 shows the possible revenues that could be generated by

Table 3

Optional Revenue Sources for the State Driver Education Program

Revenue Source	Numbers for Fiscal Year 2010	Assessed Fee Range		Amount Range	
		Low	High	Low	High
Vehicle License Plates Fee	8,411,240	\$ 5.00	\$ 5.00	\$ 42,056,200	\$ 42,056,200
Driver Licenses Fee	2,489,481	\$ 5.00	\$ 5.00	\$ 12,447,405	\$ 12,447,405
Vehicle Insurance Policy Surcharge	3,000,000 ^a	\$ 20.00	\$ 20.00	\$ 60,000,000	\$ 60,000,000
Vehicles Insured Fee	8,411,240	\$ 5.00	\$ 10.00	\$ 42,056,200	\$ 84,112,400
Family Assessment	138,212 ^b	\$ 50.00	\$ 100.00	\$ 6,910,600	\$ 13,821,200
Local Government Assessment	138,212 ^b	\$ 50.00	\$ 100.00	\$ 6,910,600	\$ 13,821,200

^a Estimated number of policies

^b Average daily membership of ninth grade students for fiscal year 2010

Source: DPI and DMV data and OSBM analysis

several of the options. Considering that only eight states fully fund their driver education programs, it seems reasonable that North Carolina should look to other revenue sources to fully or partially fund its Program.

Number of Students Served and the Outcome of the Program

DPI projects the number of ninth grade students each year that are eligible to take driver education in the LEAs. However, it does not collect any data on the number of students that actually enroll and complete driver's education courses each year. Based on the 91 LEAs responses to OSBM's survey, 85.8 percent of the students eligible to take driver's education during fiscal years 2008 through 2010 enrolled in a driver's education class. Further 77.8 percent of the eligible students in the 91 LEAs actually completed a driver education course and obtained a Drivers Eligibility Certificate. Table 4 shows the number of students eligible for driver education for fiscal years 2008 – 2010 and the number that enrolled and completed a driver education course.

Table 4
Student Eligibility, Enrollment, and Completion Data for 91 LEAs for Fiscal Years 2008 thru 2010

Fiscal Year/Percentages	Number of Eligible Drivers	Number of Enrolled Drivers	Number that Completed Course
2008	106,406	90,826	81,363
2009	107,671	93,204	84,042
2010	107,783	92,211	85,029
Three Year Average	107,287	92,080	83,478
Percent of Eligible that Enrolled		85.8%	
Percent of Eligible that Completed			77.8%

Source: OSBM Survey of LEAs

Further 77.8 percent of the eligible students in the 91 LEAs actually completed a driver education course and obtained a Drivers Eligibility Certificate. Table 4 shows the number of students eligible for driver education for fiscal years 2008 – 2010 and the number that enrolled and completed a driver education course.

Table 5
Students Completed Driver Education and Obtained Driver License for 20 LEAs for Fiscal Years 2008 thru 2010

Fiscal Year/Average/Percent	Number that Completed Course	Number that Obtained License
2008	8,760	8,617
2009	8,967	8,688
2010	8,712	8,443
Three Year Average	8,813	8,583
Percent of Completed that Obtained Driver License		97.4%

Source: OSBM Survey of LEAs

Information on the number of students that actually obtained their driver licenses after completing a driver education course was limited – 20 of the LEAs reported this data. In these LEAs, slightly more than 97 percent of the students that completed the driver education course obtained their Level I limited learner's permit. Table 5 shows the LEAs response to the survey questions about the numbers of students completed the course and the numbers that obtained their Level I learner's permit.

Ways to Improve the State Driver Education Program

The most meaningful improvement that 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.

Management and Oversight

When North Carolina removed driver education from its required high school curriculum in 1994, DPI no longer retained direct oversight of the Program. The LEAs were delegated primary responsibility in administering their programs. Thus, there appears to be only limited program management and oversight at the state level. For example, there are 11 DPI employees that spend a fraction of their time on the Program. Their estimated time spent on the Program totaled one-eighth of a full-time position in fiscal year 2010. Two of the employees, the Chief Health Officer and Health Education Consultant, estimate that they devote four and two percent of their time, respectively, answering questions from the LEAs and the public about driver education and addressing other driver

education issues. According to a 2002 report for the Governor’s Highway Safety Program,² LEA driver education coordinators expressed a desire for more state guidance and communication from DPI and DMV. The report stated that a full-time Program Coordinator in DPI could assist the LEAs in a number of areas, such as providing guidance and oversight to the LEAs and coordination with other state agencies. A 2007 report by the National Driver Education Standards Project³ also emphasized the need for centralized program administration at the state level for driver education programs. Specifically, the report specifies that each state should have a single agency or coordinated agencies that have authority and responsibility for implementing, monitoring, evaluating, and enforcing its driver education program. The report also states that a full-time funded program administrator should be employed by the agency with oversight responsibility for the state’s driver education and training. The LEA program coordinators contacted by OSBM believe that a full-time Program Coordinator is needed and should be assigned to DPI. DPI officials agreed that there needs to be a full-time coordinator position at the state level within DPI. For the oversight and guidance to be successful, there needs to be more cooperation between DPI and DMV, and more direct communication with the LEA coordinators. A full-time driver education coordinator at DPI could provide greater management and oversight of the Program and promote coordination between DPI and DMV. The Program Coordinator position should be funded from the current driver education appropriations.

Standardized Curriculum

GS 20-88.1, GS 115C-215, and GS 115C-216 require the State’s Driver Education Program to have 30 classroom instructional hours and six hours of behind the wheel instruction. This is consistent with a 1949, the First National Conference on High School Driver Education which recommended a driver education course of 30 hours of classroom and six hours of behind the wheel driving instructions. 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 curriculums still require 30 hours of classroom and six hours of behind the wheel instructions. Some national driver education organizations standards recommend more classroom and driving time than 30 classroom and six driving instructional hours. For example, the American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association (ADTSEA) – National Curriculum Standards – requires 53 hours of classroom instruction and 10 hours of behind the wheel instruction. Similarly, the Novice Teen Driver – Education and Training Administrative Standards requires 55 hours of classroom, 10 hours of in-car observation, and 10 hours of behind the wheel instruction. The 2002 Review of Current Practices report shows that about one-third of the North Carolina LEA program coordinators and instructors who responded to the survey felt that the 30 hours of classroom instruction should be increased and about two-thirds felt that the six hours of behind the wheel instruction should be increased to between eight and 10 hours. Several LEA driver education coordinators that OSBM contacted believe that the number of classroom and driving hours should be increased to 45 and 10 hours, respectively.

Currently, North Carolina’s Driver Education Program allows the 115 LEAs to select their own driver education curriculum provided it includes 30 classroom instructional hours and six hours of behind the wheel instruction. Many of the LEAs that responded to OSBM’s survey reported that they use a combination of curriculums in their programs. For example, the Randolph and McDowell LEAs use a combination of three curriculums – DMV Manual, ADTSEA curriculum, and their own designed curriculum. Further, 65 of the LEAs used one of the curriculums, 14 used two, 11 used three, and one used four. Table 6 shows the results of the LEAs responses to OSBM’s survey.

Table 6

Driver Education Curriculums Used by LEAs

Type of Curriculum	Number of LEAs Using Curriculum	Percent
DMV Drivers License Manual	59	45.4%
American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association (ADTSEA)	21	16.2%
Drive Right--Prentice Hall	15	11.5%
LEA designed	16	12.3%
Proprietary (Developed by a vendor for the LEAs)	11	8.5%
Other Organizations (License to Drive, Learning to Drive, East Carolina University, etc)	8	6.2%
Total	130	100.0%

Source: OSBM Survey of LEAs

² Educating Young Drivers in North Carolina: A Review of Current Practices, University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, January 2002

³ Novice Teen Driver Education and Training Administrative Standards, National Driver Education Standards Project, 2007.

LEA driver education coordinators and instructors have expressed interest in the State having a single standardized driver education curriculum for all LEAs. Section 7.12 of Session Law 2010-31 requires DPI, in collaboration with the Governor’s Highway Safety Commission and the North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center, to create a standard curriculum for the State’s Driver Education Program that must be ready by the beginning of the fall 2011 school year. The Curriculum must be used by all driver education programs that receive State funds. A Driver Education Workgroup consisting of staff from DPI, DOT, DMV, the Governor’s Highway Safety Commission, and the Highway Safety Research Center are currently working toward this goal. There are a number of driver education curriculums already available from national organizations, such as the ADTSEA Curriculum Standards, Driving School Association of Americas’ Curriculum Standards, and the National Driver Development Program Curriculum Standards. Table 7 identifies these and other curriculums and provides a brief description of the content of the curriculums.

Table 7

Description of Selected Driver Education Curriculums

Organization/Publication	Description
Driving School Association of Americas' -- Beginners Driver Education and Training	Nine Curriculum Content Standards 1) Understanding and Managing Risk 2) The Vehicle and Its Components 3) Vehicle Handling 4) Perception and Risk Management 5) Rules of the Road 6) Driver Behaviors 7) Sharing the Road 8) Attention 9) Respect and Responsibility
American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association -- National Driver Education Standards Project	National Curriculum Standards -- Four Phases Segment I: Novice Driver Preparation -- Classroom (45 hours) Segment I: Novice Driver Preparation -- In-car (8 hours) Segment II: Novice Driver Preparation -- Advanced Classroom (8 hours) Segment II: Novice Driver Preparation -- In-car (2 hours)
Novice Teen Driver -- Education and Training Administrative Standards	Education/Training Standards -- Two Stages First Stage: 1) 45 hours of classroom/theory 2) 10 hours of behind the wheel instruction 3) 10 hours of in-car observation Second Stage: 1) 10 hours of classroom and in-car instruction (can be enhanced by simulation or driving range instructions)
Prentice Hall -- Drive Right	Sixteen Driver Education Standards 1) Basic and advanced driving strategies 2) Perception and decision-making techniques (defensive driving) 3) Psychological and physiological conditions of the driver 4) Rules of the road, state law, and ordinances 5) Signs, signals, highway markings, and highway design 6) Operation of motor vehicles on streets and highways (emphasis on avoiding crashes) 7) Characteristics of the highway transportation system 8) Railroad crossing safety 9) Special characteristics of urban, rural, and interstate driving 10) Preventive maintenance 11) Sharing the road with users and non-users 12) Graduated licensing 13) Insurance and liability 14) Distracted driving 15) Drugs and alcohol 16) Parental involvement
AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety -- Learning to Drive	30 classroom hours and 10 behind the wheel hours, but 24 of the classroom hours can be completed by students independently.

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 has courses that include 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 based on 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. Table 8 shows the type of qualifications these instructors held. It is possible that some LEAs misinterpreted the question and included their instructors in two categories. For example, 11 LEAs reported numbers of professional driver education instructors (34) and DPI certified (79) that were equal the numbers of North Carolina driver licenses (113).

Table 8
Driver Education Instructor Qualifications Reported by 94 LEAs as of October 2010

Qualifications	Number	Percent
Professional Driver Education Instructor	535	33.3%
DPI Certified Teacher	601	37.4%
North Carolina Driver's License	459	28.5%
Other	13	0.8%
Total	1,608	100.0%

Source: OSBM Survey of LEAs

Technology Use

Technology, such as interactive computer programs, internet, computerized presentations, Powerpoint, and videos, are resources that are being used by some driver education programs. These instructional techniques can complement the traditional classroom lecture and appeal to students who are accustomed to these teaching practices. Further, on-line or distance education courses for driver education instruction can prove more economical for teaching driver education and may be an option for the classroom portion of the training. The advantages of using on-line and distance education instruction would be the: (1) consistency of instruction, (2) ability to readily incorporate curriculum updates, (3) greater and easier access to courses which can accommodate the teenager's

schedules who may have sports, extracurricular activities, or after school jobs, and (4) afford DPI and DMV greater oversight of the course materials. A possible disadvantage of an on-line course is the difficulty for students to interact with the instructor and outside presenters, such as law enforcement officers and emergency medical personnel. The use of driving simulators may also be a feasible approach for supplementing some of the behind the wheel instructions. A 2002 survey of driver education instructors noted that using simulators would be helpful in preparation for the behind the wheel instruction and would provide a safer environment for practicing some driving skills. While not as realistic as the actual behind the wheel experience, a simulator could be used to expose students to accident or near accident experiences or other dangerous highway situations that are not practical to teach in the actual behind the wheel instruction. For example, a simulator could be used to demonstrate a real crash situation or the delayed response for someone talking or texting on a cell phone. The estimated cost of such a simulator is about \$100,000 plus the cost of a mobile classroom to house the unit. While the use of the higher-end driving simulators may not be practical for all classrooms or even all LEA programs because of the cost, the use of more powerful personal computers along with CD ROMS are viable options. The use of the higher-end driving simulators – 12 consoles (seats), screen, server, and software – would need to be tried as a pilot program before large investments are made in purchasing or leasing this type of equipment. With the current state of the State’s economy it may not be practical to spend that much money on high-end simulators. However, it may be practical to apply for highway safety grant funds or use a small portion of the Driver Education Program funds to purchase or contract with a vendor to develop driver education software that can be used on computers and made available to all LEA driver education programs. The Wake County LEA already using driver education software as part of its program’s curriculum.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is another area that improves the overall quality of driver education. As early as 1994, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) identified parental involvement as a target area for improving teen driver education. Specifically,

“Parents, guardians, or other adults should play a greater role in the education and licensing of novice drivers. There will always be the need for additional supervised oversight during initial training. Research has shown that parents and other guardians have a great potential to influence youngsters.”

The Novice Teen Driver Education and Training Administrative Standards identify parent involvement as an important part of a successful driver education program. Parents of students enrolled in driver education should be required to attend a parent seminar or a pre-course session that outlines the parent’s responsibilities and identify opportunities to improve student driving skills and reduce a student’s crash risk in several ways.

- Manage the novice driver’s learning-to-drive experience to determine the readiness of the teen to begin the process, and supervise the teen’s driving so that the parent can better determine their readiness to advance to the next licensing stage and assume broader driving privileges;
- Supervise an extended learner permit period of at least six months that provides at least weekly opportunities for the novice driver to accumulate a minimum of 50 hours of supervised practice driving in a wide variety of increasingly challenging circumstances;
- Supervise an extended intermediate license period that temporarily restricts driving unsupervised with teen passengers and during night time hours until the parent determines the teen’s readiness to drive unsupervised in these high risk conditions; and
- Negotiate and adopt a written agreement between the teen and parent that reflects the expectations of both teen and parent and clearly defines the restrictions, privileges, rules, and consequences that will serve as the basis for the teen to earn and for the parent to grant progressively broader driving privileges.

The parents should also complete a debriefing with the driver training instructor to inform the parent of the progress and proficiency of the teen driver. This final session should include a reminder that it is the parent who must ultimately determine the teen’s readiness to obtain a license with full driving privileges and of the parent’s responsibility and important role in helping the teen to become a safe driver. The commercial driving school that contracts with Wake County has developed a manual –“Parent and Teen Behind-the-Wheel Training Manual” – that it provides to each parent of a driver education student. The manual contains information to help the parent supervise their child’s driving, including, guidelines for conducting in-car practice, driving rules, parent-teen practice driving contract, parent-teen driving contract, and the driving lesson material from the driver education curriculum.

Coordination with Driving Licensing Authority

The end result of a student's driver education experience is taking DMV's written and driving test to get a "limited learners permit". The Novice Teen Driver Education and Training Administrative Standards recommend that there be a formal system of communication and collaboration between a state's driver education agency (DPI and LEAs) and the driver licensing authority (DMV) that allows the sharing of information between the agencies. The sharing of information should include written and road test results for all driver education students who take DMV's driver license tests and the LEAs' notifying DMV of students with poor academic performance and disciplinary problems in school or those who drop out of school which are the basis for DMV to suspend their driving privileges. The sharing of driver license test results can be a way of evaluating the State's Driver Education program and the individual LEA programs. There is some limited data on the number of driver education students that complete the course and subsequently get their learner's permit, but the data does not reflect test results. Twenty of the LEAs that responded to the OSBM survey reported that 97 percent of the students that completed the driver education course obtained their driver licenses. LEAs are currently required to report to DMV on any students with poor academic performance and disciplinary problems and students that drop out of school before the age of 18 and DMV is required to suspend the students Driver Eligibility Certificate (driving privileges). However, a March 2010 Preliminary Review of the suspension of driving eligibility certificate process by the Program Evaluation Division identified a number of weakness in the suspension process, including:

- No single State agency is responsible for the oversight of the suspension process,
- LEAs are inconsistent in their application of the suspension criteria and reporting students to DMV.
- Notification of driving privileges are sent to students who may be legal minors rather than their parents or guardians, and
- Weaknesses in DMV's software that LEAs use to report students who drop out of school or have disciplinary problems.

Developing standardized driver education instructor certification requirements and monitoring the certification process is another area in which DPI and DMV should coordinate.

Program Performance Measures

OSBM reviewed various driver education reports and studies and interviewed national experts and state and local driver education officials to identify performance measures that could be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the State's Driver Education Program. However, there is a lack of information that actually defines or establishes performance measures to evaluate driver education. While there have been numerous driver education studies conducted in the United States and abroad attempting to document the relationship between driver education and accident and citation rates for teen drivers, these studies have generally failed to provide evidence of decreased crash rates among teens who have participated in driver education programs. Further, driver education experts believe that accidents and traffic citations are not good performance measures to determine the effectiveness of a driver education program because even the teen drivers who complete a driver education course still lack the maturity and driving experience of older drivers. Teen drivers also tend to take risks, especially when faced with peer pressure.

As previously noted, DPI does not track the number of students that actually enroll in or complete a driver education course. While these measures will not actually determine how safe these drivers are, it does provide information on the number of students that are actually participating in the State's Program. OSBM's survey of the LEAs shows that less than 80 percent of the students eligible for driver education completed a course during the last three fiscal years (2008 – 2010). Another potential way of measuring the effectiveness of the Program would be to look at the test results of the students who take DMVs written and road tests for their driver's license, however this data is not collected by DPI or DMV.

While not readily quantifiable, the best measures of the quality of a driver education program is how the program compares to nationally recognized program standards, such as the quality of the Program's overall management, the comprehensiveness of the curriculum, the number of instructional hours (classroom and behind the wheel), the qualifications of the instructors, the amount of parental involvement, and coordination with driver licensing. While these criteria are good indicators of a quality driver education program, they still do not measure the effectiveness of the program.

NHTSA has developed a driver education assessment tool that is based on the Novice Teen Driver Education and Training Administrative Standards to evaluate individual states' driver education programs. The NHTSA identifies a team of outside experts to conduct a comprehensive assessment of a state's driver education program. After conducting interviews with various individuals from the state's program and reviewing the state's driver education documentation, an overview of the program's current status is provided noting the program's strengths and weaknesses. The assessment also provides recommendations for improvement. The "Novice Teen Driver Education and Training Administration Standards" along with NHTSA's Highway Safety Guideline Number 4 are used as the frame work for the assessment conducted in Maryland and another assessment is planned for Oregon in December 2010. These assessments are only done at the state's request and recommendations are solely for that state's use. The services of the team are at no cost to the state.

CONCLUSIONS

While the State's Driver Education Program appears to be working well in many regards, there are opportunities for improving the management and oversight of the program, funding the program, delivering driver education instruction to students, increasing parental involvement, and measuring the effectiveness of the program. As the Program is currently designed, there is no single State agency with full responsibility or oversight of the Program. Since driver education is an educational program, DPI is the logical agency that should have responsibility of management and oversight of the Program. However, DPI has delegated most of the management and oversight responsibilities to each of the LEAs.

North Carolina is one of only eight states that fully fund their driver education programs, with the other 42 states only partially funding or not funding their programs. Most of the states that do provide some funding use various dedicated revenue sources such as fees, surcharges, or families paying for the driver education training. Considering that the Driver Education Program is an extracurricular activity and not part of the core education curriculum it seems reasonable that North Carolina should explore the possibility of using other funding options for the State's Program. Table 3 on page 3 identifies a number of optional revenue sources – vehicle license plates fee, driver license fee, insurance policy fee, insured vehicle fee, family co-payment, and local government assessment – that could be considered for funding the Program.

Even though DPI allocates funds to the LEAs' driver education programs based on the projected number of students that will be eligible to take driver education each year, less than 80 percent of the eligible students actually completed driver education during the last three fiscal years. Further, an average of the \$1.8 million of the funds appropriated during the three year period was not spent by the LEAs. Thus, DPI may need to adjust the funding allocation process to consider the unspent funds and the number of eligible students that do not take or complete driver education training.

Because of the decentralized manner in which the State's Program is organized, each LEA determines the driver education curriculum it uses. In fact, the LEAs that responded to OSBM's survey are using at least eight different types of curriculums. There are a number of driver education curriculums that have been developed by national organizations that recommend more hours of classroom and driving instructions than North Carolina's Program requires. Further, as the Driver Education Workgroup develops a new standardized curriculum for the State's Program, it should consider using one of the curriculums that are already available or at least the components of the various curriculums.

The qualifications of driver education instructors have been identified as important components of a quality driver education program. At the national level the trend is toward standardized driver education instructor credentials that include certification based on college-level courses in driver education and continuing education credits. Yet, the qualifications of the instructors in North Carolina are dependent upon what each LEAs decides is needed.

New technologies are available that will enhance and improve the teaching of driver education. These technologies are readily available and have already been incorporated into some of the LEAs driver education programs and others are being used or recommended by national organizations. While some of these technologies, such as simulators, may be too expensive to use, the others are reasonable and should be considered.

Parental involvement is also considered an important component of a successful driver education program. Involving parents in the drive education training from the start gives them a better understanding of what their teens will be learning and also co-opts them into having a greater role in their teens' overall driver education training, especially the driving portion. Parents become an extension of the driver education training long after their teens complete the course.

Even though North Carolina driver education officials consider the State's Driver Education Program to be successful, it does not have data to demonstrate how successful the Program is. Prior to OSBM's survey of the LEAs no one in the State knew how many students were actually completing driver education training. Therefore, without this type of information and more empirical data to measure the success of the Program no one knows whether the driver education funds are being spent wisely or whether the Program goals and objectives are being met. OSBM's evaluation of the Program has identified a number of areas where the Program could be improved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

OSBM recommends that:

- A full-time Program Coordinator position be created within DPI to manage and oversee the State's Driver Education Program. The person in this position will be responsible for coordinating with the LEAs, DMV, DOT, and national driver education organizations. The positions should be funded out of the driver education funds.
- The General Assembly consider funding the Program with one or more of the fee and assessment revenue sources that OSBM identified on page 3.
- DPI adjust its funding allocation process to factor in the number of students that enrolled in driver education courses in previous years and also the amounts of driver education funds that are unspent from previous years.
- The Driver Education Curriculum Workgroup use one of the nationally recognized driver education curriculums or components of these curriculums in developing the new standardized curriculum. The Workgroup also consider expanding the number of classroom and behind the wheel hours and incorporating new technologies, such as interactive computer programs, videos, computerized presentations, on-line and distance learning instructions, and simulation technology in the new curriculum.
- DPI collaborate with DMV to establish a driver education instructor certification process that establishes minimum education and re-certifications requirements for all driver education instructors. Require the re-certification to be based on the continuing education credits that DMV requires of commercial driving school instructors. DPI allow current driving education instructors who do not have the required credentials five years to upgrade their driver education credentials.
- DPI make parental involvement a requirement of the State's Program and a condition of a student's enrollment and completion of driver education training.
- DPI require all LEAs to collect and report student enrollment and completion data for their education programs as well as the number of students that obtain their level I learner's permits.
- DPI collaborate with DMV to obtain the driver license test results for all students that take driver education training and analyze the data to assess the quality of the LEA programs.
- DPI identify other performance measures that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the overall State Program and the individual LEAs programs.

- DPI request from NHTSA the services of a driver education assessment teams to evaluate the State's Driver Education Program.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

OSBM wishes to express its appreciation to DPI, DOT, DMV, and the driver education representatives for the LEAs that responded to our survey and telephone contacts during this review.

APPENDIX A

OSBM SURVEY OF LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES

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APPENDIX A

OSBM DRIVER EDUCATION SURVEY QUESTIONS
FOR LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES (LEAs)

Name of LEA: Summary of OSBM's Local Education Agency Survey Responses

1. **91 of the 115 LEAs responded to the survey.**
2. Number of students eligible for Driver Education for fiscal years:
 - FY 2007-08 106,406
 - FY 2008-09 107,671
 - FY 2009-10 107,783
3. Number of students enrolled in Driver Education for fiscal years:
 - FY 2007-08 90,826
 - FY 2008-09 93,204
 - FY 2009-10 92,211
4. Number of students that completed Driver Education training for fiscal years:
 - FY 2007-08 81,363
 - FY 2008-09 84,042
 - FY 2009-10 85,029
5. Number of students that obtained driver licenses after completing Driver Education training for fiscal years: **Note: Only 20 LEAs reported driver license data**
 - FY 2007-08 8,617
 - FY 2008-09 8,688
 - FY 2009-10 8,443
6. What were the actual Driver Education dollars spent by LEA for fiscal years:
 - FY 2007-08 \$27,379,846
 - FY 2008-09 \$27,297,439
 - FY 2009-10 \$26,603,430
7. Are any local funds/resources used to support your Driver Education Program?
 - 25 Yes
 - 66 No
8. If local funds are used, what are the sources and amounts of the funds? (check all that apply and provide the amount of funds) FY 2009-10
 - LEA school funds Amount \$230,666
 - County/municipal general funds Amount \$226,111
 - Trust or foundations Amount \$ 0
 - Other, specify _____ Amount \$ 48,031

APPENDIX A

9. Category of program that LEA uses to provide Driver Education training:
- 52 In-house by LEA
 - 21 Contract (Contractor provides, instructors, vehicles, and supplies)
 - 12 Driver Education contracted and vehicles, supplies, and related expenses provided by LEA
 - 9 Combination of contract and LEA Personnel

10. What is the LEA's Driver Education curriculum based on?
- 59 Division of Motor Vehicle drivers license manual
 - 16 LEA designed
 - 21 ADTSEA (American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association) based curriculum
 - 15 Drive Right
 - 11 Proprietary/Vendors
 - 8 Curriculum from other organization

11. What are the qualifications of the Driver Education instructors? Provide the number of instructors for each category.
- 535 Professional driver education instructor
 - 601 Certified teacher
 - 459 North Carolina driver license
 - 13 Other

12. Are Driver Education vehicles, supplies and materials purchased through the North Carolina Purchasing and Contract Office?
- 59 Yes
 - 32 No

If no, explain

13. Rate the administrative and management support that your LEA receives from DPI.

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
15	18	36	12	10

14. Rate the administrative and management support that your LEA receives from DOT.

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
21	16	34	13	7

15. Rate the administrative and management support that your LEA receives from the DMV.

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
6	13	18	21	33