



Methodology to Evaluate Teen Driver Training Programs

PUTTING RESEARCH TO WORK

BRIEF

In the United States, teenage drivers are more at risk of being involved in crashes than any other age group. Statistics reveal a clear need for improving teenagers' driving skills, judgment and behavior. Driver education programs are a crucial part of training drivers. These programs are managed on a state-by-state basis, and therefore significant variability can exist between states, and to some degree even within each state.

What's the Problem?

Novel approaches to driver education are developed and studied each year. However, states and driver education professionals continue to grapple with identifying effective methods to help teens drive safely.

The crash risk in Wisconsin is similar to that in other states. In 2010, Wisconsin's teen drivers (16 to 19 years of age) represented 4.8% of the total Wisconsin licensed driver population but accounted for 10.8% of the total crashes. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) is dedicated to supporting new driver education programs to improve the driving skills and behavior of teen drivers. A clear need existed for programs to be objectively evaluated for effectiveness.

WisDOT's Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV) oversees the certification and implementation of new commercial driver-training programs, while public, private and parochial school efforts fall under the oversight of Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction (DPI). With the variety of driver education programs, there is a need for program assessment.

Research Objectives

While WisDOT has in place an exhaustive process to license driver-training schools, the department does not have established methods to analyze the entire statewide construct of how young drivers are trained. The goal of this research effort was to develop a means of analyzing the current young-driver training efforts within Wisconsin to better understand the effectiveness of the state's different driver-training programs and the tools and approaches used.

Methodology

The research effort was divided into two phases. Phase I focused on the development of an evaluative methodology that is based upon a review of relevant literature, policies and data sources. The resulting methodology informed the activities of Phase II: the development of an implementation plan.

The research was completed through a modified evaluability assessment (EA). EA can be defined as a set of procedures that have been designed to analyze the decision-making system that is to benefit from performance information and to clarify the goals, objectives and assumptions against which performance is to be measured.

EA was adopted because it is generally conducted prior to a full-scale program evaluation. Because aspects of teen driver-training programs fall under the oversight of multiple agencies in Wisconsin, a method was desired that would encourage discussions between agencies and also facilitate interactions with driver education program providers. EA was deemed appropriate because it requires researchers to collaboratively engage with program staff and stakeholders. EA also addresses a program's likelihood of achieving its anticipated outcomes, changes required for results-oriented management and the likelihood of the evaluation contributing to improved program performance.

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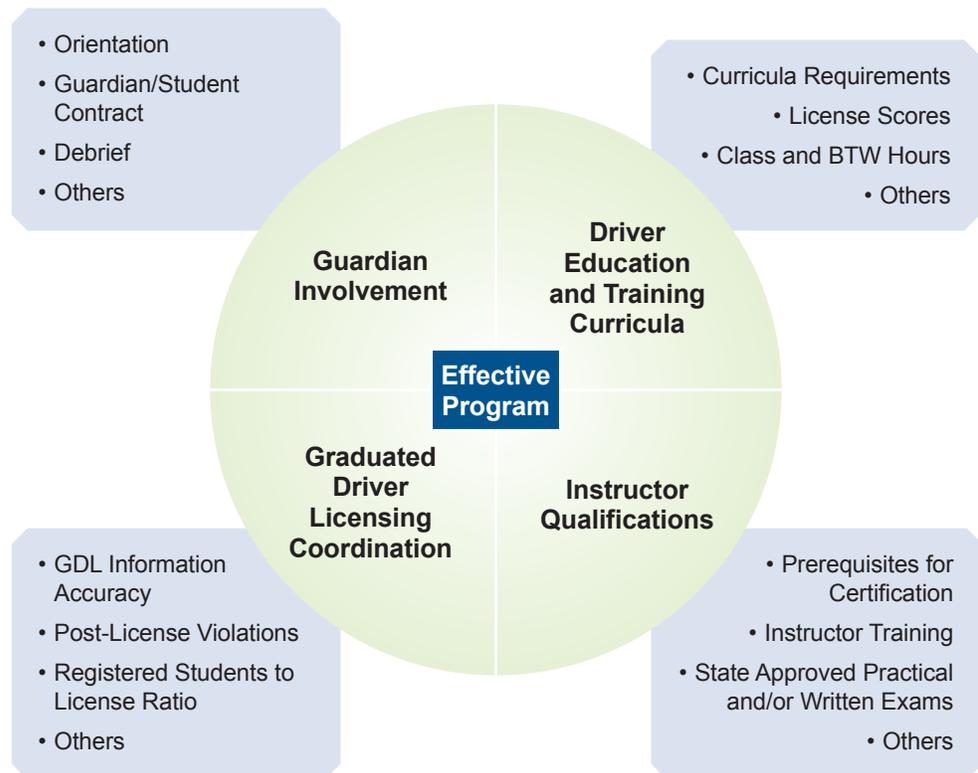
Results

The result of the research effort was the development of a methodology and the identification of potential data sources to analyze the effectiveness of driver-training programs in improving the demonstrated safety and behavior of teen drivers in Wisconsin.

The research team identified five data areas of information which could be used to assess components of effective driver-training programs: guardian involvement, education and training, coordination with GDL, instructor qualification and program administration. It was determined that the program administration component wasn't appropriate at this time.

The research team also prepared a Program Assessment Tool User Guide. The User Guide serves as a step-by-step set of instructions for WisDOT staff members—or schools themselves—to use in completing the program assessment tool.

Components of an effective teen driver-training program



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Recommendations / Implementation

Activities related to increased guardian involvement have the potential to make the most difference in the education and GDL process. GDL programs have been proven effective in reducing the crash risk for teen drivers, especially when GDL requirements are combined with parental or guardian involvement efforts. Coordinated efforts are encouraged throughout the implementation plans.

Preparing young drivers for the road requires a systematic program of assessment to guide commercial driving schools and public driver education programs in their efforts.

*This brief summarizes Project 0092-12-11,
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