

Spring 5-29-2007

## **Amending Teenage Graduated Licensing with Mandatory Drivers Education**

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Amending Teenage Graduated Licensing with  
Mandatory Drivers Education

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EMPA 396 – Capstone Project

May 29, 2007

Spring I - 2007

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## ABSTRACT

The California Department of Motor Vehicle reports that the rate of teenage traffic accidents, injuries and fatalities is high. This results in vehicle accidents as the leading cause of death for teenagers between the ages of 15-19. The Department of Motor Vehicles warns young drivers that, "If you are under 18 years old, your risk of fatal accidents is 2 times that of the "average" driver." Your risk of an injury accident is three times higher than the average driver."

(<http://www.dmv.ca.gov/pubs/hdbk/pgs76thru78.htm>)

A study by the Council of States Government states that, "between 1995 and 2004, 31,000 young people died in car crashes involving 15-20 year olds drivers, the majority of which were passengers, occupants of other vehicles and pedestrians." (Council of States Government Healthy States Initiative Graduated Drivers Licensing Toolkit, 2006) The public and Government should be concerned because car crashes continue to be the number one cause of death in teenagers ages 15-20.

Studies show that teen drivers with teen passengers are eight times more likely to be involved in fatal car crashes than any other age group.

Studies show that teen accidents are caused by lack of driving experience, knowledge of cars and needing to push themselves and cars to the limit; which directly relates to unsafe driving. This research proposal will examine the effectiveness of Graduated Licensing provisions and amending the provisions to include mandatory continued driver's education for teenagers ages 16-19 as a requirement to driving privileges for provisional and full licensing.

## **Introduction**

This research proposal is dedicated to the memory of my stepchildren Tia Leilani Santos, age 17, Keilan Santos, age 14, my nephew, Daniel Santos "Nino" Torres, age 20 and family friend, Paloma Sanchez, age 12. On December 25, 2004 the lives of these young people ended when the 18 year old driver lost control of the Ford Explorer he was driving causing it to rollover at least 100 feet from the highway. The accident happened at 9:50 p.m. and they were passengers ejected from the vehicle causing fatal death. As the study by the Council of State Governments states that, "during 2004, 40 percent of all vehicle crash deaths among teenagers occurred between 9:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m." It further states that, of all the deaths, 64 percent were passengers." (Council of States Government, Graduated Drivers Licensing Tool Kit, 2006) That night their lives entered the statistics of teenage deaths reflected in the research for this proposal.

The loss of their lives and the emptiness of life without them are immeasurable, as I'm sure it is for other families who have to learn to live life after these fatalities. My hope is that through this research proposal I may bring awareness to the high number of teenage fatalities due to car crashes and the importance of providing an effective and efficient drivers education and training system for teenagers. Society, citizens and leaders need to realize that although Graduated Licensing has helped to lower the number of deaths, the number of teen fatalities still remains the highest of any age group. This means that the current driver's education and training system is not working and this research proposal seeks make the necessary recommendations to save teen lives.

Automobile accidents continue to be the number one cause of deaths in teenagers between the ages of 15 - 19 year olds. The majority of these accidents result in fatalities and

most often involve the deaths of passengers; which in most cases are the same age as the driver or younger. In an effort to prevent these tragedies, driving laws require 15 ½ -18 year old teenagers to complete a Graduated Licensing process by which licensing is gradual. Although studies show a decrease in the number of teen deaths since Graduated Licensing provisions were introduced, the number of teen accidents and fatalities remain high.

The purpose of this research proposal is to research the issue of unsafe driving among teenagers and how it contributes to the number of fatalities involving 15 -19 years old. The research proposal will evaluate the effectiveness of Graduated Licensing and driver's education and training in relation to teaching safe driving skills; including a change to the requirements of Graduated Licensing. The research proposal would add mandatory continued driver's education as a requirement for teenage driving privileges. The research questions, would amending Graduated Licensing provisions in the Jared Brady Act of 1997 to include mandatory continued driver's education to maintain driving privilege be sufficient in lowering the number of teen deaths in car crashes?

The research will include the following sub questions that will provide responses that will help determine whether or not Graduated Licensing should be amended to include mandatory continuing driver's education. The following sub questions will be applied to this research proposal: 1. What is the public's perception on the number one cause of death in teens? 2. What is the public's perception on the effectiveness of GL laws and processes? 3. Is driver's education and training an effective deterrent?

For purposes of this research proposal the study will focus on teens between the ages of 16-19, it will not include 15 years old because are only eligible for a driving permit. Mandatory continued driver's education in the form of safe driving classes to maintain

teenage driving privileges may serve as a reminder of how important driving safely is, including the consequences of not doing so. Continued safe driving classes to maintain teenage driving privileges may help to bring a realization that the issue of unsafe driving is very serious. Thereby creating awareness to teens, parents and other that the possibility of an injury or fatality happening to them or someone they know is very real.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The article featured on Washingtonpost.com titled, "Parents Hold the Key to Safe Driving" talks about the issue of safe driving from the standpoint that teenagers lack behind the wheel training; because they lack in experience, parents need to take an active role in their teenager's driving. The article features Phil Berardelli, who wrote the handbook, *Safe Young Drivers: A Guide for Parents and Teens* in 1994. He also created the website [www.safeyoungdrivers.com](http://www.safeyoungdrivers.com).

The article states that ten years later teenage driving fatalities are rising, not dropping. In the 20 months that the United States has been at war in Iraq, Berardelli (in Britt, 2004) points out 1,250 Americans have died in the conflict. "In the same period 10 times as many teens-more than 11,000-have died violently on our highways." (Britt, 2004)

In relation to the topic of this research proposal, if the Graduated Licensing provisions were to include a mandatory continued driver's education for provisional and full licensed teenagers between the ages of 16-19, teenagers would acquire more driving knowledge and safe driving skills. The outcome would be less teenage accidents and fatalities, as the article speaks to the inexperience of teenage drivers and parental responsibility relating to the rising loss of teenage lives.

This in turn relates to the research question, would amending Graduated Licensing provisions in the Jared Brady Act of 1997 to include mandatory continued driver's education to maintain driving privilege be sufficient in lowering the number of teen deaths in car crashes? Therefore, even after a teenager has completed the hours required for obtaining their driver's license, it is necessary to continue learning safe driving skills as experience is gained.

The law gives parents the responsibility of ensuring their teenager has completed the required driver's education and training; and does not require teenagers to take additional driving education or safe driving after the initial courses. This is where a parent's role becomes crucial, As, Berardelli (in Britt 2004) states, "preventing many teenage car accidents requires two things, and one is for states to raise the minimum age at which teenagers can obtain permits and licenses." (Britt, 2004), The other thing that Berardelli (in Britt 2004) states is needed to prevent teenage car accidents is, "For parents to be parents," Berardelli (in Britt 2004) says, "That means refusing to rely on training schools to teach your child and being brave enough to go out in the rain, snow, every condition and drive with him." It means not handing over the keys just so that you can stop chauffeuring your teenager. (Britt 2004)

Instead of handing over the keys, parents should take the time to drive with their teen and ensure that they are driving safely. It can be an opportunity for parents to teach their young driver the very important skill of safety behind the wheel. Berardelli (in Britt 2004) also makes a valuable and important point as he states, "You spend 16 years nurturing your child. Why place her, inadequately trained, behind the wheel of a powerful dangerous machine?" (Britt,2004) This is an excellent point to consider in this research proposal; proper driver's training and safe driving skills is key to safe driving and lowering the number of teen fatalities.

However, this does not only include the training provided in driver's training schools, it includes parents who are willing to take the time to show teens the importance of driving safely. "Some things a mother and father never gets over, as the parent of the more than 7,000 U.S. teenagers who die yearly in car accidents learn. Since September, accidents



involving teenage drivers have killed 17 people in the Washington area, emphasizing the limited effectiveness of current systems-including driver education courses in reducing fatalities.” (Britt, 2004) Parents and teens have to recognize that the amount of training required by law at this point is not enough time and places many young inexperienced drivers on the roads.

Because of this, parents need to be driving with their teens to ensure that they are driving safely. As Berardelli (in Britt 2004) states in the article, "Parents would never say to a child who wants to play the piano, I'll buy you six lessons and then you give a concert. They would never tell a kid who wants to play soccer, I'll take you to six practices and you'll be ready for the pros'... Such activities require an investment of a lot of time and money." But when the same kid wants to drive - "The most dangerous thing he or she can do in ordinary life, many parents reaction is entirely different: "Take six hours of driver's education, and here are the keys to the car.” (Britt, 2004)

The article clearly speaks to parental responsibility in preventing teenage fatalities in car crashes. In fact, it strongly suggest that parents take an active role in ensuring that their teen is practicing safe driving; which means getting in the car with them to reinforce safe driving skills. Similarly, the Council of State's Government states that, "Parents are the main enforcers of the Graduated Drivers Licensing. They often are the ones who establish driving rules, pay for gas and provide the car for teenagers. Yet, many parents appear to be unaware of the greater risks for their new drivers. So, educating parents should be a prime concern among the public and leaders. Although studies show how dangerous it is for new drivers to drive at night or have teens passengers in the vehicle, parents underestimate the risk.” (Council of State Government, 2006)

Studies show that while some parents impose nighttime driving restriction, fewer parents are enforcing the passenger restriction which causes more distraction and places teens in higher risk for crashes. Parents who underestimate the risks don't realize the dangers their teen faces behind the wheel of a vehicle, therefore the teenagers is allowed to drive without concern for risk. Parental responsibility for ensuring compliance with Graduated Licensing provisions and the driving experience of teenagers is imperative. Teenagers also underestimate the risk and parents are ultimately responsible for ensuring that their teen is experienced enough to get behind the wheel of a car on their own and be safe. As Scott Masten of the California Department of Motor Vehicle states, "Although teens quickly gain the basic vehicle handling skills and knowledge needed to operate a motor vehicle, it takes them longer to develop the higher level perceptual and cognitive skills necessary to drive safely, such as risk perception." (Masten, 2004)

As risk is related to age and development factors, combined with inexperience it can be one of the most dangerous positions a teenager can face. Masten further states, "It is known that novice teen drivers are worse compared to experienced drivers in their ability to recognize and mitigate hazards, pay attention to the important thing in the driving environment at the right time, quickly shift from one driving skill to another and match their performance with that required by environment demands. They are not as able as more experienced drivers to brake, steer, adjust their speed or coordinate these skills appropriately." (Masten, 2004). Therefore, it is the parent's obligation to understanding the risk involved in allowing a teenager behind the wheel of a car. Parents play a vital role in improving the high number of teen deaths in car crashes by understanding the risks and dangers of allowing their teens to drive without restriction. This is consistent with Britt's

statement about parents, "You spend 16 years nurturing your child. Why place her, inadequately trained, behind the wheel of a powerful dangerous machine?" (Britt,2004)

Of concern is the response from parents in the Time article, Putting Limits on Teen Drivers in which parents interviewed showed little concern for the risk involved in teen driving. Henderson states that, "some parents are ambivalent about the law and are not convinced that the restriction should apply to their children." (Henderson, 2006) In the article two parents make concerning remarks regarding their teen driving. Becky Jeffries's daughter had three fender benders during the first year of licensing. She states in the article, "She's not going to get any better by being held back. She might as well be in control of her own destiny." Another parent Dona Botti does not enforce the nighttime restrictions on her 16 year old daughter and comments, "I don't want to feel like an uncaring mother, but truthful, I'm not worried about her." ( Henderson, 2006)

These parents don't realize the risk nor are they taking responsibility for ensuring their teenager comply with Graduated Licensing provisions. In fact they are actually encouraging their teenager to take risks. However, as Henderson states, "A lot of adults think, I used to drive at night with my friends, so what the harm?" says Judith Lee Stone, president of the nonpartisan Advocate for Highway and Auto Safety in Washington. "It's hard to change people's thinking unless there's a crash involving someone they know. Then people get it immediately." ( Henderson, 2006)

Sadly, parents eager to free themselves from driving their teens don't consider the risks and don't believe that a car crash involving their child can happen. Henderson states, "Experts say that parents who assume that simply reminding kids to buckle up and watch the speed limit miss the central problem: the adolescent brain may be unable to handle the

responsibilities of driving. Researchers with the National Institute of Mental Health have showed that the parts of the brain that weigh risks, make judgments and control compulsive behavior are still developing through the teen years.” (Henderson, 2006) This is why parents are given the responsibility of being the primary enforcer of Graduated Licensing for their teenager. As stated in the findings by the Council of States Government “ When parents are educated about the contents of and reasons for GDL, it helps them to focus on the most dangerous driving conditions for their teenagers and may even lead to parent creating stricter driving limits than the state requires. GDL can actually be an ally for parents who wish to limit their teen’s driving, but feel pressured by others parents to let teens ride with their new driver.” (Council of States Government, 2006)

In the report Driving: Through the Eyes of Teens, by the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia and State Farm Insurance, reference is made to the importance of parents understanding their role in the teen age driving and risks involved. “While many parents recognize their role in teaching teens to drive, parental influence can extend beyond the role of teacher to that of monitor and enforcer of consequences. Nearly two-thirds of teens said that their parent’s opinions about cell phone use mattered to them. Only one-fourth of driving teens say their parents require they take on any financial responsibility for vehicle repairs and maintenance.” ( Driving: Through the Eyes of Teens, The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, 2007) The role of parents in ensuring that teenagers becomes safe and experienced drivers is a key factor, they can promote safe driving skills with continued monitoring and behind the wheel training for their teenagers.

Although the parental role is pivotal to ensuring teenagers are experienced and safe drivers, the role of driver’s education and training is just as critical to teenagers driving

knowledge and skills. Masten explains that the reasons drivers education has failed to provide better safety results is that, “ a) the courses fail to teach the knowledge and skills that are critical for safe driving in teens. b) the students in the courses are not motivated to use the safety skills they do learn. c) completing the courses fosters overconfidence in students. d) the courses fail to adequately address teen lifestyle issues. e) the courses do not tailor the safety content to meet student’s needs. On the positive side, there is evidence that driver education courses with enough behind the wheel practice can be a good way to learn driving skills and gain knowledge.” ( Masten, 2004)

Consistent with the research for this proposal the literature review shows that increased driving knowledge and skills is crucial to improving the number of teen deaths in car crashes. The literature is also consistent with the fact that teenager needs continued driving education in order to keep learning and gaining driving skills and knowledge. Masten states, “ If driver education and training are to continue being offered, experts recommend that the courses (a) be redesigned to emphasize safe decision making and reduce the risk taking behavior by teaching teens to make good decisions and be aware of risks. (b) include increased parental supervised driving practice. (c) be integrated with graduated licensing programs, and (d) be multi-staged with separate courses in the learner and provisional stages of licensing.” ( Masten, 2004)

The research data shows that all key informants and survey respondents are in agreement with the literature review findings. Parents need to take a more active role in providing the drivers education and training for teenagers to become safe drivers. Parents and teenagers need continue taking drivers education courses as they can both benefit from increase knowledge and skills involving safe teen driving. In fact, 48 of 64 people surveyed

agreed that parental responsibility for a teenagers driving experience is the most effective method for a teenager learning how to drive safely. 39 of 64 respondents agree that teens and parents should continue driver's education.

## METHODOLOGY

In operationalizing the research question, would amending Graduated Licensing provisions in the Jared Brady Act of 1997 to include mandatory driver's education to maintain teenage driving privilege is sufficient in lowering the number of teen deaths in car crashes, the following terms are defined.

Graduated Licensing is a system designed to phase in young drivers from beginning to full driving privileges. A teenager driver is granted provisional privileges during the first phase of licensing and then full licensing after completion of the second phase. The term maintain means that in order for a teenager between the ages of 16-19 years old to have a provisional or full license they must attend a periodic mandatory safe driving class to keep driving privileges. Fatalities, for the purposes of this research proposal refers to all deaths resulting from car crashes, including a driver between 16-19 years old and passenger(s) between the ages of 15-19 years old. Five-year period means five calendar years from date mandatory continued driver's education courses are made an additional requirement of the Graduated Licensing provisions.

In this research proposal, the term safe driving classes refer to a class such as the California Highway Patrol's Smart Start Program or a presentation on the dangers of unsafe driving such as the City of Elk Grove's, In the Blink of An Eye. In the Start Smart Class CHP officers talk with teenagers and parents about the dangers of unsafe driving. It includes factors that lead to accidents, how teens can avoid accidents, importance of seatbelts, and the responsibilities of teen drivers and their parents. The most compelling component of this class is testimonials from families who have lost loved ones in fatal car accident. These testimonials show young drivers and their parents the reality of unsafe driving and can leave

a lasting impression on their minds and hearts. The City of Elk Grove's Street Racing Education Campaign, In the Blink of An Eye brings the reality of unsafe driving directly to the high schools. Officer Misty Dailey presents to thousands of students at local high school in the metropolitan Sacramento region. The compelling presentation includes the DVD, In the Blink of An Eye, which shows actual footage of teenagers filming themselves and the car ahead of them speeding to get to a party. As they are driving, talking, laughing, speeding and filming each other, the camera records when the driver in front suddenly loses control. He crashes and his girlfriend is ejected from the car killing her instantly.

The presentation also includes the Red Asphalt movie and ends with a student observation of the car Nicholas Davis was driving the night. Nicholas Davis was a 17 years old student at Laguna Creek High School in Elk Grove, California and had just completed the permit phase of Graduated Licensing. He took his mom's car key and drove her car at high speed and within minutes of leaving his home he crashed into a tree after losing control of the car. Nicholas was killed instantly and his passenger survived the crash.

Rebecca Davis donated the car to City of Elk Grove for the purpose of educating teenagers about the dangers of speeding and unsafe driving. The car is preserved as it was the night Nicholas died and brings the reality of car crashes and its tragedies to the forefront. The impact this presentation has on students is powerful and the horrific results of driving unsafely are suddenly very real. Harsh reality but effective in getting the message to teenagers that these car crashes are real and it could happen to them if they don't drive safely. Every teenager and parent wanting to drive should be required to attend one of these presentations as a preventive measure of driving unsafely. In fact, the research shows that



teenagers should be required to take a class such as the CHP's Start Smart class as a prerequisite to application for a driver's permit.

### **KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS**

Key informant interviews include Officer's Jasper Begay and Bernie Pico of California Highway Patrol Start Smart Program, Rebecca Davis of Lives Interrupted Inc, Merry Banks of The California Automobile Association, Traffic Safety Division, Misty Dailey, City of Elk Grove Police Department, Lieutenant Daniel Dailey, Sacramento Sheriff's Department and Robert Lee, California Department of Education.

Merry Banks, California State Automobile Association (AAA) Traffic Safety Division and participated in the research, development and implementation of Graduated Licensing in California. She gives a clear reminder that teens need to get the message that, "Driving is a privilege, not an entitlement." Too many parents and teens take driving as a given and not something that is to be earned." (Bank, 2007) Robert Lee of the California Department of Education, Special Projects, assigned to Drivers Education shares that "parents need to be more diligent." I extended my son's driving permit period because I did not believe he was ready for the next graduated licensing step." (Lee, 2007) Officer's Pico and Begay's statements that "GDL has helped but parents need to be more responsible about teen driving issues" and "Parents need to understand the concept of teen driving and need to continue educating their teens. Parents also need to be educated." (Pico and Begay) are in agreement with Mr. Lee's statement that "parents need to be more diligent."

Misty Dailey, is the Community Officer with City of Elk Grove Police Department who presents City's Speed Racing Education Campaign, "In the Blink of An Eye". From her perspective, "Graduating licensing laws are effective but they need to be more stringent"

because "Parents don't regulate their kid's behavior enough once driving age is reached, many feel their work is done." ( Dailey, 2007)

Lieutenant Daniel Dailey, Sacramento County Sheriff's Department states, "safe driving education should happen from the beginning. Parents need to know what is being taught in order to re-enforce the material and set the example while driving." ( Dailey, 2007) Rebecca Davis sums it up with her perspective that "Messages about unsafe speed and improper turns need to be repeated on a consistent basis in order to impact teen drivers, as there is a disconnect between teens understanding of the danger of driving and the reality of how teen crashes occur." "Parents do not really understand the high crash rates during the first critical year of driving." ( Davis, 2007)

There is consistency among the key informants that mandatory continued driver's education is necessary in order to effectively address the problem of high teen fatalities and crashes. Specifically, key informants were asked, "Do you agree that periodic attendance in safe driving classes for teenagers between ages 15-19 should be a requirement to maintain driving privileges? Key informants provided the following responses:

"Yes, it would be great to hold them accountable through some kind of requirement. Making it mandatory makes them accountable." (Banks, 2007) Officer Pico states, "Yes, teens need to be reminded about the laws, driving habits and things that will get them in trouble while driving." (Pico, 2007) Officer Begay agreed, "Yes, follow up education is always better than no education." (Begay, 2007) Officer Dailey comments, "Absolutely, they watch "Fast and Furious" 50 times yet only get the important driving messages and tips a few times in early training. Bad habits are developed and need to be broken." ( Dailey, 2007) Lieutenant Dailey tells us, "Yes, teens need constant re-enforcement to learn and maintain perishable skills. A

high school basketball player gets more training and education.” (Dailey, 2007) Rebecca Davis, who lost her son in fatal car crash shares that she, “agrees that repeat driver safety courses are a good idea. I also believe that parents should also attend these courses to ensure they understand the dangers of teen drivers.” (Davis, 2007) Lieutenant Dailey agrees, “Yes, teens need constant reinforcement to learn and maintain perishable skills.” (Dailey, 2007)

In contrast, Robert Lee of the California Department of Education states that, “The problem is the lack of responsibility by a state or authority accountability. There is no oversight or monitoring of driving schools or online courses and there is no one holding schools accountable for driver’s education as stated in the California Education Code.”

(Lee, 2007) Merry Banks agrees, “The education among the driving schools is inconsistent. The curriculum and behind the wheel training needs to be consistent.” (Banks, 2007) Officer’s Pico and Begay also share that, “training in high schools in better education. Private schools and online courses rush students in getting license.” “There are no checks and balances in the current system to ensure that a student is experienced enough to be a safe driver.” (Pico and Begay, 2007) In fact Lieutenant Daily suggest, “Continue GDL with annual driver testing (written/performance) for all drivers for the 1st and 2nd year.” (Dailey, 2007) Officer Dailey shared Mr. Lee sentiments as she states that, “Private owned schools are profit centered, not concerned about kids.” Lieutenant Daily agrees, “Go back to high school driver’s education and training.m The quality of both was better before it became a business for profit.” ( Dailey, 2007)

All key informants are in agreement that mandatory continued driver’s education is key to lowering the number of teen fatalities. All agree that inexperience is the number one cause of teen crashes including the fact that they have little knowledge of how powerful a motor

vehicle is. Officer Begay comments that, 'Most teens have no concept of how powerful a "machine" a car is.' (Begay, 2007) Merry Banks shares that, "the difference is that even though the young can react quickly they don't know what to do because they lack driving experience." (Bank, 2007) Rebecca Davis believes that, "messages about the dangers of speed and reckless driving need to be consistent and long term" (Davis, 2007)

## **SURVEYS**

The research also includes 64 public opinion surveys with ten questions directly related to teen driving and driver's education. The results of the survey concluded the following:

- 38 out of 64 respondents strongly agree that Graduating Licensing laws need to include mandatory safe driving classes as a prerequisite to an application for a driver's permit or licensing of a teenager.
- 35 out of 63 respondents strongly agree that Graduated Licensing laws should amended to extend the amount of time young drivers spend a driver's education and training program.
- 33 out of 63 respondents strongly agree that age and lack of experience are key contributors of unsafe driving and teenage crashes.
- 32 out of 63 respondents strongly agree that the minimum age for enrolling in a driver's education and training program for purposes of obtaining a permit and license should be 16 years old.
- 35 out of 63 respondents agree that car crashes continue to be the number one cause of death in young people between the ages of 15 -19.
- 32 out of 63 respondents agree that Graduated Licensing laws have helped to reduce the number of teen deaths between the ages of 15-19 but the number of teen deaths remain high.

- 32 out of 64 respondents agree that Graduated Licensing needs to include a mandatory course that provides basic knowledge of operating a motor vehicle.
- 10 out of 64 respondents disagree that parents and teenagers be required to attend periodic safe driving classes during the graduated licensing process and until a driver reaches 20 years old.
- 8 out of 64 disagree that parents teaching a teen how to drive is the most effective method for them to learn how to drive.
- 40 out of 64 either strongly agree or agree that traditional driver's education and training provided in a high school setting is more effective than private driving schools or online driving courses.

Overall, the survey results concluded that age and inexperience are the main causes for teen crashes and that Graduated Licensing should be amended to include more time spent in driver's education and training; this includes mandatory continued driver's education. Specifically, key informants and respondents share concerns regarding the lack of responsibility in the current education system to provide drivers education and training as set by California Education Code, sections 51220(j), 51220.1 and 51850-51854. When respondents were asked their opinions as to whether driver's education and training in the high school setting is more effective than private owned or online classes; the response was overwhelming in favor of driver's education and training back in the high school setting.

Of concern is the fact that there is no oversight or monitoring of driver's schools or online courses and that it has become a for profit business. Driver's education and training curriculum is inconsistent and the lack of credentialed drivers education instructors are leading causes of a drivers education system that is failing.

Key informants and survey respondents provided the following responses to the sub questions:

1. What is the public's perception on the number one cause of death in teens? The public's perception is that car crashes due to a lack of driving experience is the number one cause of death in teens. Based on the key informant interviews and surveys teenagers need to spend more time in driver's education and behind the wheel training. It is agreed that parents hold the primary responsibility for ensuring that teenagers become experienced safe drivers. The research found that age is a factor in the lack of experience and it is suggested that teenagers and parents spend more time learning safe driving skills.
2. What is the public's perception on the effectiveness of Graduated Licensing laws and processes? Overall, the public's perception is that Graduated Licensing laws and processes are effective in lowering the number of teen fatalities and crashes; however the research data show that the number of teen deaths due to car crashes remains too high. It is agreed that Graduated Licensing laws need to be stricter and include mandatory continued drivers education to maintain driving privileges specifically, talking to teenagers about the consequences of unsafe driving.
3. Is driver's education and training an effective deterrent? The public's perception is that driver's education and training is an effective deterrent. However the current system for providing effective drivers education and training needs to change. Specifically, key informants Merry Banks and Rebecca Davis noted that driver's education in California needs to be re-invented. Rebecca Davis shared that, "California needs to take a strong stand on overhauling Drivers Education and placing it back in the school system. Much more stringent regulation of driving instructors should be mandated." Merry Banks agrees stating,

“reinvent drivers education to offer teenagers the best drivers education and behind the wheel training.”

All key informants and survey respondent agreed that although Graduated Licensing is effective at lowering the number of teen deaths, the current driver's education and training system is not effective at providing the education and training necessary for teenagers to become skilled, experienced and safe drivers. Based on the research data this means that California needs to reconsider how it is providing driver's education and training to teenagers and parents; including amending Graduated Licensing provisions to include mandated continued drivers education as a requirement for driving privileges.

The research question can be measured by comparing the number of 16-19 year old deaths in fatal car accidents before an amendment requiring continued drivers education to the number of 16-19 year old deaths in fatal car accidents after continued driver's education is required. This would require studying the number of teen fatalities in this age group over a five-year period starting from the date the safe driving classes become a requirement for provisional and full licensing of the Graduated Licensing provision.

In ensuring that the research in this study is not skewed by the researchers own bias, the researcher must keep in mind the purpose of the research. Noting that the study is not about the researcher or personal opinions. A researcher should not impose his or her personal opinion or feelings about the subject into the study. The researcher should stay aware of the issue, who is affected by it and the outcome of the research. The researcher may remain unbiased by respecting the opinion of others, keeping an open mind and working with the facts. Knowing that there are pro's and con's to every issue and that problems can be effectively resolved when both sides of an issue are considered. The researcher should also

ensure that those who participate in the study understand the issue, the purpose and the importance of their participation, thereby ensuring that they are willing participants consenting to be a part of the research project.

For purposes of this research proposal, ensuring internally validity may be determined if the research shows that adding the requirement of safe driving classes to Graduated Licensing provisions reduces the number of fatalities within a five year period. The study may ensure external validity if the research is able to be utilized in studies that involve drivers that are not included in this age group, such as older adults who experience loss of driving experience and ability with age.



## SAFE DRIVING EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR TEENAGERS SURVEY

Survey Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Total
Graduated Licensing Laws need to include mandatory safe driving classes as a prerequisite to an application for a driver's permit or license	38	21	5			64
Graduated licensing laws should be amended to extend the amount of time young drivers spend in a driver's education and training program.	35	22	4	2		63
Age and lack of experience are key contributors of unsafe driving and teenage car crashes.	33	27	3			63
The minimum age for enrolling in a drivers education and training program for purposes of obtaining a permit or license should be raised to 16 years old.	32	22	3	6		63
Car crashes continue to be the number one cause of deaths in young people between the ages of 15-19.	21	35	4	3		63
Graduated licensing laws have helped to reduce the number of teen deaths between the ages of 15-19 but the number of teen deaths due to car crashes is still high.	19	32	12			63
An amendment to Graduated licensing programs needs to include a course that provides basic knowledge of operating a motor vehicle.	27	32	5			64
A requirement for parents and teenagers to attend periodic safe driving classes during the graduated licensing process and until a young driver reaches the age of 20 will help to reduce the number of teen deaths in car crashes.	21	18	13	10	2	64
Under Graduated Licensing laws parents are given the primary responsibility for a teenagers driving experience. This is the most effective method for a teenager to learn how to drive.	21	27	3	8	5	64
Traditional driver's education and training provided in a high school setting is more effective than private driving schools and online driving courses.	20	20	13	7	4	64

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In the words of key informant Merry Banks, *"It takes a community to resolve this issue. DMV, law enforcement, parents, schools, State agencies and legislators."* The need to continue pursuing policy change in teen driving issues is an effort that must become a priority. It is a societal issue that few are willing to discuss and step up to make changes. Thousands of young lives are lost each year as a result of teenage car crashes. It is time to revisit the policies, the education and training and public awareness to the seriousness of this issue. The following policy recommendations are made in response to the finding of this research proposal:

1. Amend Graduated Licensing to include a mandatory attendance in an introductory driving course, such as the California Highway Patrol's Start Smart Program or the City of Elk Grove's In a Blink of An Eye; as a prerequisite for a drivers permit or license. As these programs rely on grant funding because the organizations don't have the money in the budget to expand the programs I would urge the legislature to consider providing funds to law enforcement agencies to continue promoting Graduated Licensing and providing safe drivers education classes to teens, parents and the community.
2. Amending Graduated Licensing to include a mandate for continued Driver's Education for teenagers In order to maintain driving privileges. The research proposal clearly supports mandatory continued driver's education for both parents and teens. A need for teenager and parental accountability for experienced and safe teen driving is needed. Continued drivers education is a key factor in lowering the number of teen fatalities and car crashes.

Teenagers and parents should be required to attend a class or presentation such as the CHP's Start Smart and the City of Elk Grove's, In the Blink of An Eye Street Racing Education Campaign.

3. Introduce legislation that would create a revision to driver's education in California with mandates for consistency in curriculum and behind the wheel training among all instruction.

As the research shows there needs to be more accountability for driver's education and training. A requirement to continue driver's education to maintain driving privileges is a good way to give students responsibility and accountability for their driving.

4. Establish a governing body that would have oversight and regulate the effectiveness of driver's education and training and enforce accountability. As the research shows there currently no oversight or accountability for drivers education and training in California. There are no set regulations, guidelines or curriculum by which driving school and online classes must comply. Driver's education and training is inconsistent and the system is failing as the number of teen fatalities remains high and the number one cause of death in teenager's age 15-19 years old.

5. Bring drivers education back into the classrooms of our public schools as mandated in California Education Code section 51220(j), 51220.1 and 51850-51854 by provide funding for drivers education and training instruction. The research clearly shows strong support for compliance with the education codes involving drivers training. Key informants and respondent both agree that driver's education belongs back in the classroom of high schools and back into the academic environment. The research in this proposal concluded a strong

support for re-evaluating the way driver's education and training is being taught and who is teaching it. As Rebecca Davis shares, "California needs to take a strong stand on overhauling Drivers education and placing it back in the school system. Much more stringent regulations of driver's education instructors should be mandated." (Davis, 2007)

## CONCLUSION

In concluding this research proposal lets take a moment to remember that "Although learning to drive is a rite of passage for American teenagers, it is also a time filled with danger." (Council of States Governments, 2006). As the research and data shows continued drivers education is necessary in order to ensure that students are getting sufficient driving knowledge and skills needed to be experienced and safe drivers. It is evident that teenagers need more safe driving education and behind the wheel training in order to significantly reduce the number of teen fatalities. The literature review and results of the data clearly indicate parental responsibility as a key contributor to both experienced safe drivers and risks. The mindset of parents and teenagers that fatalities such as these happen only happen to other families has to change; it is this kind of thinking that put teenagers at risk for car crashes.

As the enforcers of Graduated Licensing parents have the opportunity to show their teenagers how to make safer choices and can teach safe driving skills by example. Clearly 31,000 lives between 1995 to 2004 is an alarming number of lives lost. Clearly, one life lost in these fatalities should be too much, let alone 31,000. The fact is that teenage driving needs to be stricter and amending Graduated Licensing provision in the Jared Brady Act of 1997 to include mandatory continued driver's education will be sufficient to lower the number of teen's deaths that remains high.

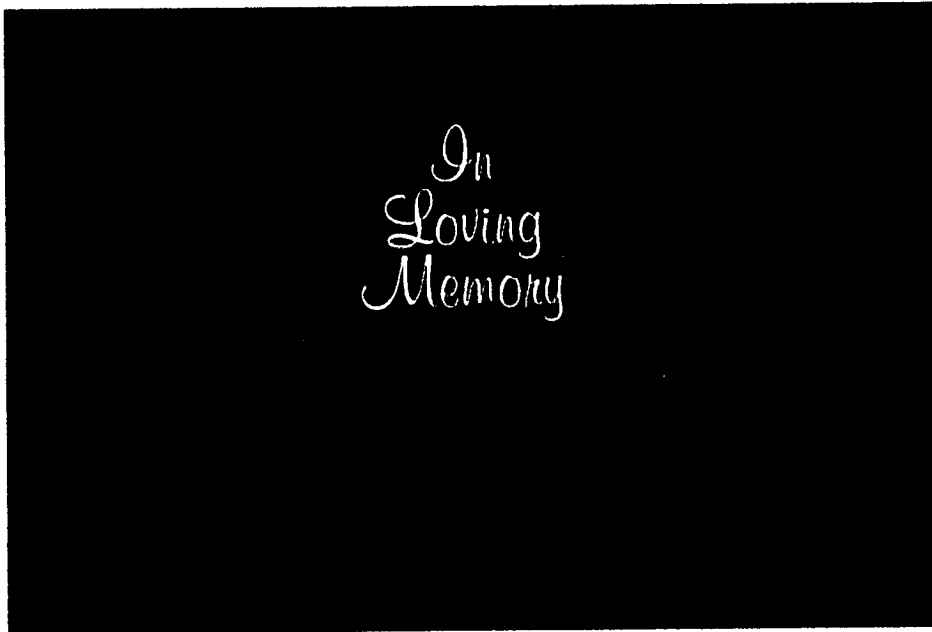
So, the conclusion to the research questions is that by requiring teens to continue driver's education as a privilege for driving; the number of teen deaths in car crashes will lower significantly. The number of teen fatalities will also lower significantly as teenagers and parents realize that they will be held accountable for their driving knowledge and skills.

As Merry Banks stated, “driving is a privilege, not an entitlement” and that’s what parents and teenagers need to remember. For those who have lost loved ones in fatal car crashes the quest to save just one life and family from experiencing the same pain is an everyday reality. To those families enough is not being done to address the issue and bring forth the changes necessary to significantly reduce the number of teenage deaths between the ages of 15-19 years old.

As the report *Driving: Through the Eyes of Teens* recommends, “More work needs to be done in this area of research and outreach to reduce teen crashes and their resulting deaths and disabilities.” (The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, 2007) Re-evaluation of driver’s education and training is also key to changes necessary to improve a system that is failing its youth. Driver’s education in schools provide the academic structure and bring drivers education right back into their system that is designed to help students learn, grow and excel in life.

**Tia Leilani Santos - 17 years old**

**Keilan Tito Santos - 14 years old**



**Deceased in a fatal car crash along with family members**

**Daniel "Nino" Torres Santos, 20 year olds**

**Paloma Sanchez, 12 years old**

**December 25, 2004**

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