

Traffic Safety Facts

Traffic Tech – Technology Transfer Series

Parent-Taught Driver Education in Texas

In April 1997, the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) implemented rules, based on legislation passed in 1995, for parent- or guardian-taught novice driver training that meets all the driver training requirements necessary for licensing teens 16 to 18 years old. As currently constituted, the parent-taught driver education program in Texas essentially grants parents the same role, rights, privileges, and responsibilities as were formerly granted only to State-licensed and approved novice driver instructors and driver education programs.

NHTSA sponsored a study by the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) to evaluate the parent-taught driver education (PTDE) option in Texas. The primary goal was to determine the impact, if any, the PTDE had on the education and training of young novice drivers and on the safety of novice drivers on Texas streets and highways. TTI conducted this evaluation using three different research techniques: (1) focus groups with driver education instructors, teen drivers, and their parents; (2) a statewide mail survey of young drivers; and (3) an analysis of Texas driver records, including a comparison of driver records both before and after implementation of the graduated driver licensing (GDL) in program in Texas in 2002.

Differences in Attitudes, Knowledge, and Skills of Novice Drivers

Based on the responses of 500 young drivers in a statewide survey and participants in nine focus groups, driver education (DE) students and their parents agree that the PTDE program offers advantages over commercial and public school modes of DE delivery in terms of cost, comfort, and individualized personal attention to the student. Professional DE instructors believe the negative aspects of the PTDE program outweigh any perceived benefits, due largely to a lack of training, knowledge, and teaching skills on the part of parent-teachers.

No differences in driving knowledge and skills among the three DE course delivery modes (i.e., public, commercial,

and parent-taught) were discernible from self-reports of specific driving-related knowledge and skills.

However, as measured by State-administered tests, PTDE students demonstrated poorer driving knowledge early in the training and licensing process and poorer driving skills at the end of formal driver education. Although only a small proportion of DE students failed to pass either the test required to obtain an instructional permit or the optional in-vehicle road test on the first attempt, significantly more PTDE drivers required multiple attempts to pass either test.

Differences in Driving Errors, Traffic Offenses and Crash Involvement

Based on 1.4 million Texas driver records, PTDE novice drivers were convicted of more traffic offenses than commercial or public school-trained drivers before implementation of the Graduated Driver Licensing GDL program, especially in the first year of driving.

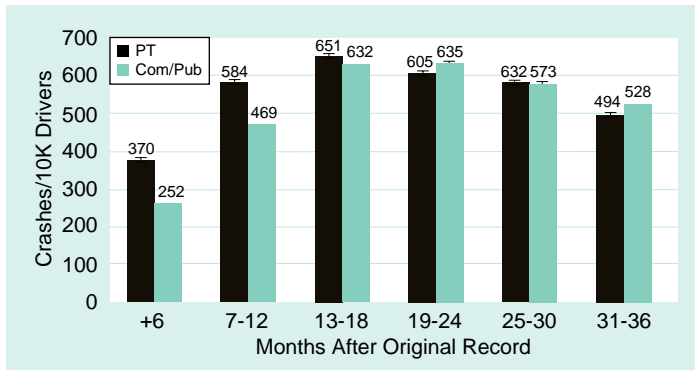
Since implementation of GDL, convictions for traffic offenses are substantially fewer for all novice drivers. Differences that did exist were smaller and favored PTDE drivers during the period of most supervision (i.e., instructional permit phase of licensing). During the period when requirements for adult supervision were reduced (probationary license), and after supervisory and other GDL restrictions were removed (full licensure), PTDE drivers again experienced proportionally more total traffic convictions than drivers trained under commercial/public school DE programs.

Based on self-reports of novice drivers subject to GDL in Texas, the incidence of crashes involving PTDE drivers was not greater than that reported by commercial or public school trained novice drivers.

Analysis of driver records, however, indicate that before implementation of the Texas GDL, PTDE novice drivers experienced more serious crashes at a higher frequency over the

first 18 months of driving experience than drivers from other DE modes. Through the next 18 months of driving most differences disappeared except for possible injury crashes which occurred with greater frequency among commercial/public school (Com/Pub) DE students (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
All crashes as a function of driver education mode: No GDL



Since implementation of GDL, crashes are substantially fewer for all novice drivers. Differences that do exist generally are small and favor PTDE drivers during the period of most supervision (i.e., the instructional permit phase of licensing). During the period when requirements for adult supervision are reduced (provisional license) and after supervisory and other GDL restrictions are removed (full licensure), PTDE drivers experience serious crashes at proportionally higher frequencies than drivers trained under Com/Pub DE programs (see Figure 2). This finding is evident for involvement in non-incapacitating, incapacitating, and, as illustrated in Figure 3, fatal crashes.

Figure 2
All crashes as a function of driver education mode: GDL

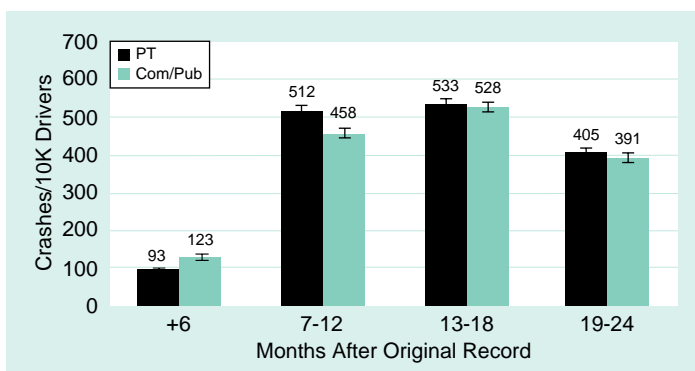
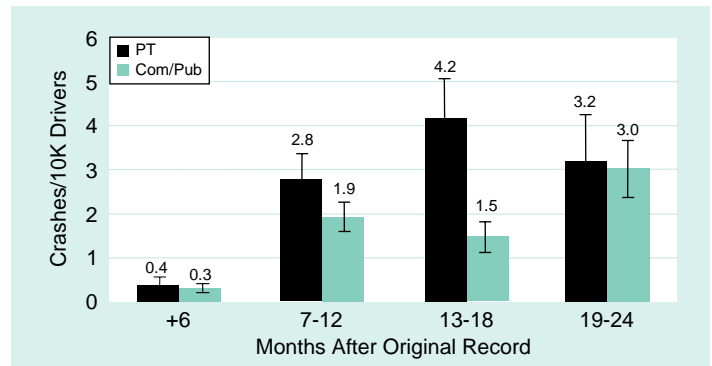


Figure 3
Fatal crashes as a function of driver education mode: GDL



Undoubtedly, some parents who serve as their teens' sole driving instructor under the program are highly motivated to do well and succeed in producing novice drivers who are at least as prepared to drive as teens who take a traditional driver education. Many other parents, however, are highly motivated to be their child's primary driving instructor, have the best interests of their children at heart, but simply are not equipped with the requisite aptitudes, attitudes, and experience to do so successfully. Still other parents who opt to participate in the program are neither appropriately equipped nor motivated.

Conclusions

Based on the analysis of information derived from nine focus groups, the responses of approximately 500 young drivers to a statewide survey, and analysis of more than 1.4 million Texas driver records, there is evidence to suggest that the parent-taught driver education program has a negative influence on the overall safety of novice drivers in Texas, especially in terms of young driver crash involvement.

How to Order

For a copy of *Parent-Taught Driver Education in Texas: A Comparative Evaluation* (153 pages plus appendices), write to the Office of Behavioral Safety Research, NHTSA, NTI-130, 400 Seventh Street SW., Washington, DC 20590, send a fax to 202-366-7096, or download from www.nhtsa.dot.gov. Patty Ellison-Potter, Ph.D. was the Project Manager.



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