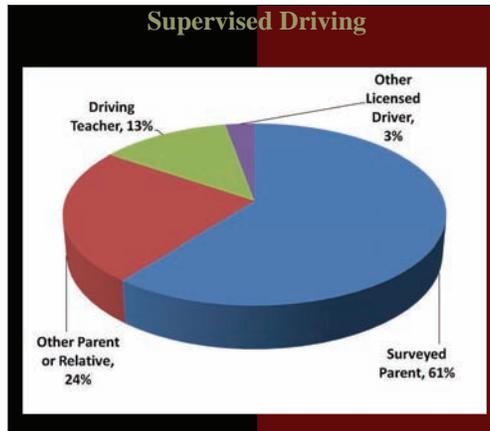


Teen Licensing: Surveying What Parents Have to Say

North Dakota remains one of the few states where a graduated policy for teen licensing has not been adopted and only one of two states where 14-year-olds can drive independently, despite the higher risk of teens being involved in crashes (NHTSA 2007, McCartt et al. 2003). A survey of 288 parents of teens was conducted at N.D. driver's licensing centers to ascertain perceptions regarding the current teen licensing process.

The five-minute survey offers insight into teen driving activities, parent opinions on the licensing process, and potential for enhancing the current licensing system.



In the survey, parents reported supervised driving experience from 4 to 800 hours for their teens. The surveyed parent supervised 61 percent of this driving time, relatives and other parents oversaw 24 percent, driving teachers conducted 13 percent, and other licensed drivers administered 3 percent. Only 6 hours of supervised driving with a certified driving instructor is required for North Dakota teens to obtain a license. Parent responses confirm this is a definite weakness of the system.

Timing of Permits

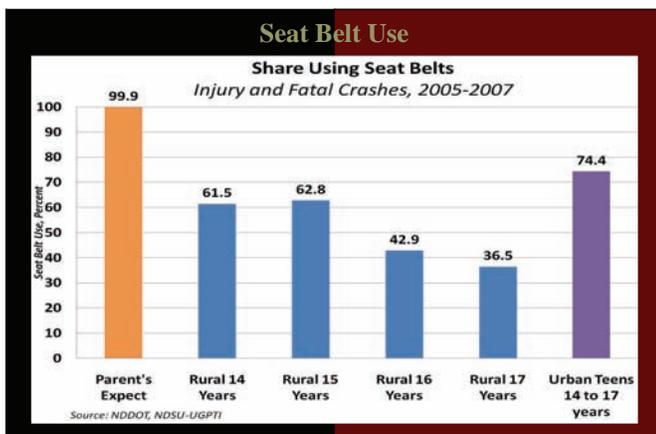
Teen maturity and the fact that it is legally permitted are the most influential factors in parents' decisions to allow their teens to become licensed. Identifying factors that influence parent decisions may provide insight for policy makers. Policy underlies the decision process for all parents as it is one of the two highest-rated influences in the parent decisions for the 14- to 17-year-olds.

Even with several reasons to license their teen at 14, 78 percent of parents support licensing at age 16. Parents' views on permit age differ significantly based on their teen's age. While a majority of parents of 14- and 15-year-olds agree with the current permit age (but nearly the same share of 15-year-olds parents would prefer waiting), shares of parents of 16- and 17-year-olds are substantially lower at 17 and 15 percent.

A longer permit phase is also strongly supported in the survey responses. Moving to a 12-month permit phase is favored by 52 percent of the parents. The longer permit phase would allow teens the opportunity to gain more experience driving under varied conditions.

Parent Comments

- **14 is too young to have a driver's license. 16 minimum.**
- I think driving age should be 16 yrs U.S. law.
- **Very important to keep Behind the Wheel instruction.**
- Permits should have to be kept for a longer period of time. More instructional driving lessons. Not able to get license until 16 or older.
- **Teens under the age of 16 should not be able to have passengers and/or should only be able to drive during daylight hours.**
- I feel 14 years old is too young for some, but not all new drivers. A lot depends on an individual's maturity and sense of responsibility.



Seat Belts

One result of the survey reflected the expectations of parents regarding seat belt use by their teens. Survey responses show that 99 percent of parents expect their teen to be belted at all times in a vehicle. Teen crash statistics suggest that these expectations do not fully carry through to action in the teens.

What do non-parents think?

A version of the survey was available for a limited number of 67 non-parent drivers at the DMV sites. For complete results of both surveys visit www.ugpti.org/rtssc/.

Driver Restrictions

Parents were asked about limits they would consider appropriate for novice teen drivers. Only 14 percent of the parents felt teens should be subject to a complete passenger restriction with the exception of adults and relatives. A higher share, 64 percent, thought a passenger limit of one person would be acceptable.

Awareness of the nighttime driving risk is evident as 85 percent of parents support an 11 p.m. curfew for teen driving activities. Parents' concern for teen cell phone distraction is an obvious risk factor as 88 percent feel

In the Classroom

Classroom instruction is a common aspect of the licensing process in most states, but North Dakota deems classroom instruction optional. This brings up the surveyed issue of the amount of in-class instruction that should be completed by the teen prior to licensing and how many of those hours the parents should participate in.

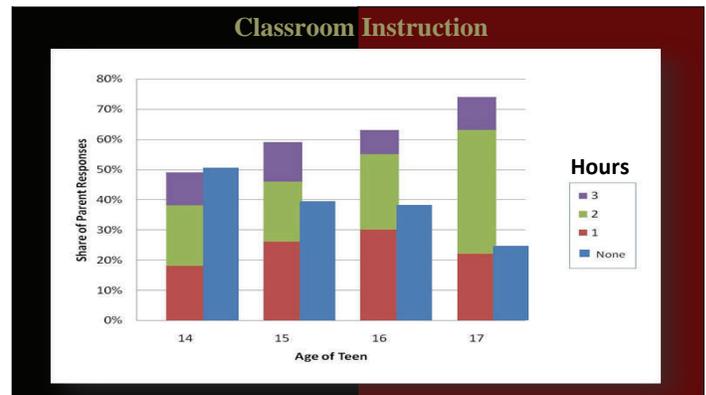
Parent responses overwhelmingly supported classroom instruction for their teen during the licensing process. The median recommendation for classroom time was 20 hours. The answers ranged from 0 to 500 hours. Only 3 percent of the parents felt that teens should have no classroom instruction.

Parent Participation

Most parents, 63 percent, feel that parents should participate in at least one hour of their teen's driver education classroom time. Considering answers of parents by age of teen, the parents of 14-year-old drivers were the only

teens should be required to turn their cell phone off while driving. Less support is offered for policies that would curtail music and media distractions. Only 41 percent would consider limiting music and media in the early independent driving phase.

Strong support for seat belt and traffic law adherence is shown, as 91 percent feel teens should be allowed no leniency in traffic and seat belt violations.



group to have the larger share of parents supporting no classroom time for parents. In this group 49 percent felt parents should attend classes. This compares to parents for teens ages 15, 16, and 17, in which 61, 62, and 74 percent, respectively, believe parents should attend at least one hour of class.

In Conclusion...

The teen driver parent survey conducted at DMV sites across North Dakota in the summer of 2008 yielded valuable information regarding teen driving activities and parents' views on the current licensing system. Parent responses provide evidence that there is a good awareness of teen driver safety issues. Responses from parents and other drivers also show strong support for changes to the state's current teen licensing system. Primary elements in the recommendations identified through the survey are to: raise the permit age, lengthen the permit phase to 12 months, require 50 supervised driving hours, and set a minimum classroom instruction requirement where the parent joins the teen for at least one hour during the course.

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