REPORT OF THE

JOINT SUBCOMMITTEE STUDYING THE

EFFECTIVENESS AND FUNDING

OF DRIVER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

TO

THE GOVERNOR

AND

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA

HOUSE DOCUMENT NO. 42

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
RICHMOND
1983

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE

Alan A. Diamonstein, Chairman
Charles J. Colgan, Vice-Chairman
Elmon T. Gray
A. Victor Thomas
Marian Van Landingham

STAFF

Legal and Research

Division of Legislative Services
Norma E. Szakal, Staff Attorney
Brenda H. Edwards, Research Associate
Angela S. Cole, Secretary

Administrative and Clerical

Office of Clerk, House of Delegates

Report of the
Joint Subcommittee Studying the
Effectiveness and Funding
of Driver Education Programs
in the Public Schools
To
The Governor and the General Assembly of Virginia
Richmond, Virginia
January, 1983

To: The Honorable Charles S. Robb, Governor of Virginia
and
The General Assembly of Virginia

The 1982 General Assembly agreed to House Joint Resolution No. 80 and appointed a subcommittee of the House Committees on Education and Appropriations, and the Senate Committees on Education and Health and Finance to study the effectiveness and funding of driver education programs in the public schools.

House Joint Resolution No. 80, which is appended to this report, requested that the joint subcommittee determine whether such programs are effective, whether they should be continued or dismantled, whether the behind-the-wheel requirement should be abolished, and whether such programs, if continued, should be administered and operated in the present or in some other manner.

The members of the joint subcommittee represented the House Committees on Appropriations and Education and the Senate Committees on Finance and Education and Health.

Delegate Alan A. Diamonstein, of Newport News, and Senator Charles J. Colgan, of Manassas, served as Chairman and Vice-Chairman, respectively.

History of Driver Education Programs

A. Nation

In the period just after World War I, several public schools initiated formal safety programs. Driver education, a component of the safety program, did not gain momentum until the 1930's. Prior to 1920, instruction in traffic safety was integrated with other courses taught at the secondary and/or elementary level. In 1923, a separate course in driver education was given in Gilbert, Minnesota. The first course actually called Driver Education, which included road instruction, was offered in Pennsylvania in 1934. In 1936, the first intensive one-week course for high school teachers of driver education was held in Bluefield, West Virginia. As schools assumed more responsibility in this area, other safety-related agencies (e.g., automobile clubs, motor vehicle departments, National Safety Council) became active supporters of the program. By 1940, twenty states had organized courses of study in driver education, and the question no longer was whether or not the schools should assume responsibility for driver education, but only to what extent and in order to achieve what goals.

Today, high school driver education is a formal program of instruction in the public schools throughout the nation. The program is offered in many forms and a wide variation of quality. They have continued to grow in popularity[1] to the point where in 1980, "driver education was being provided to approximately 75 percent of all eligible high school students at an annual cost estimated to be between 250 million to 350 million dollars. Ninety percent of these costs were being met by state and local resources. In reaching this level of public usage, driver education has been promoted on its face validity as a highway safety measure."[2]

B. Virginia

Safety and driver education were first provided in the state's secondary schools by an act of the legislature in 1927. The Board of Education is required by law (§ 22.1-205, Code of Virginia) to

establish a standardized driver education program in the public schools. In 1947, the Board of Education adopted regulations to establish driver education as an integral part of the required health and physical education program. Students, age fifteen years eight months enrolled in the program must possess a temporary instruction permit, valid for one year, which will entitle them to operate a motor vehicle, provided the permit is in his immediate possession and he is accompanied by a licensed operator or chauffeur eighteen years of age or older. Parental permission is required before a student may enroll in the program.

The Division of Motor Vehicles may issue an operator's license (§ 46.1-357) to 16 and 17-year-olds upon proper application and satisfactory evidence that the applicant has successfully completed a driver education program approved by the Department of Education.

When an operator's license is issued to persons under eighteen years of age, the license must be signed by the judge of the juvenile and domestic relations court of the city or county in which the individual lives. Usually the signing of licenses of such persons is conducted during an official ceremony wherein the judge impresses upon them the magnitude of the responsibility that they are assuming.

Nonpublic and commercial schools may offer such programs for nonpublic school students or for students who are not enrolled in school. These programs must be approved by the Driver Education Service of the Department of Education for the student to be eligible to apply for a Virginia Operator's License at age 16 or prior to 18 years of age and receive insurance credit.

The state-approved program consists of 36 periods of classroom instruction and 14 periods of laboratory instruction, which is divided into seven periods of actual vehicle operation and seven periods of observation time. Driver education instruction is first offered during the first semester of the tenth grade since the greatest number of students are approaching the eligible age for obtaining an operator's license. Students who successfully complete the course are eligible for insurance credit.

Findings of the Joint Subcommittee

After surveying published studies, the subcommittee found no conclusive information on the effectiveness of driver education. Although some early studies (1960's) indicate that driver education programs produce safer drivers than "less structured programs",[3] later studies point out that this judgment might have been based on inadequate or questionable data. Critics noted, for example, that "a considerable portion of the apparent 'safety effect' formerly credited to driver education was actually due to the individual differences between persons choosing to enroll in driver education and those choosing not to do so."[4] The same source reveals that the earlier studies did not consider any experimentally controlled study of driver education. A 1980 investigation, the widely publicized study conducted by Dr. Leon S. Robertson of Yale University, cited driver education as a major contributing factor, through early licensure, to the *increased* number of teenagers involved in serious crashes.

In addition to questioning the effectiveness of all driver education programs, researchers and school officials have also studied the comparative value of public school and commercial driver education programs. Reports indicate that the negligible difference in conviction rates between students of those programs favors the public school courses. This, again, is of little significance in evaluating the program.

In the hope of resolving the inconclusions, the Virginia Department of Highways and Transportation Research Council is currently conducting a study on the effectiveness of driver education programs for the Department of Education. The objective of the study is to design, test, and implement a computerized student performance reporting system for use by the Department of Education and the local school divisions in evaluating these programs. Emphasis is to build an information system using the accident/conviction data recorded by the Division of Motor Vehicles. When completed, the system will provide driver education personnel with data to make decisions concerning the effectiveness of each program type, the effectiveness of similar programs administered by various schools, and the impact of driver experience on driver performance.

Experts and taxpayers have not only questioned the programs' usefulness, but they, as well as school officials, have begun to question the programs' cost effectiveness. Initially, it was believed that high school driver education programs would be less costly than instruction provided by

commercial driver training schools. However, some maintain that continuing increases in the programs' operating costs (i.e. vehicles, facilities, simulators, instructional materials, roadways, certified teachers) have made instruction in the public schools as costly as that in the private sector.

Information on the program's funding which was submitted to the joint subcommittee indicated that the reimbursement program for driver education was established by the Board in 1963 pursuant to legislation enacted by the 1962 General Assembly. The reimbursement program provided that local school divisions be reimbursed $25 per student enrolled in driver education programs and it permitted the local school division to charge such students an optional fee of $15 per student. Since this time, the reimbursement program has been changed from categorical aid to basic aid as a part of the state average daily membership funding (ADM) for public schools. This funding amounts to approximately $1.45 per student for grades K-12. In 1982, the Board of Education adopted a regulation to allow local school divisions to charge a maximum of $75 per student for the laboratory component of the driver education program. The regulation stipulates that the fee plus state reimbursement shall not exceed the actual cost of the laboratory instruction.

Though driver education programs are funded primarily by state and local resources, the Department of Transportation Safety, since 1969, has provided 5.5 million dollars, or 17% of the 33 million dollars in federal highway safety funds, to support driver education activities. These funds have been used to assist localities in constructing 135 driver training ranges and in purchasing 41 driving simulators, as well as numerous other pieces of equipment and supplies used in the programs. The Department also provides information on new laws, crash statistics, and literature which is designed to keep the information being taught up-to-date.

Because driver education programs are believed to contribute significantly to the increased involvement of teen-age drivers in serious crashes, the joint subcommittee requested data on the involvement of teen-age drivers in automobile accidents, property damage and fatal crashes in Virginia. The Virginia State Police submitted Virginia crash report statistics for 1981 on driver involvement, by age group, in automoble accidents, property damage, personal injury, and fatal crashes. This data indicated that drivers under age 18 were more often cited as "drivers in violation." Data from the Uniform Crime Reporting Program in 1981 showed that 815 persons, age 17, and 44,138 persons, age 18 and over, were arrested for driving while intoxicated.

The joint subcommittee also received testimony from other interested and knowledgeable persons who attested to the benefits of high school driver education programs.

A supervisor of driver education for one local school division indicated that prior to changes in the driver education curriculum in his school division, students who had completed the program were approximately 13% of the traffic violators in the city and had committed over 200 various violations. The staff of the driver education department in this school division then used this information to change the curriculum and to provide instruction that would meet the needs of the students. In-class instruction was increased to ninety hours and the behind-the-wheel component was increased to nine hours. At present, only 2% of the traffic violators in the city are students who completed the driver education program since the curriculum was changed.

It is the position of the Virginia Association of Driver Education and Traffic Safety Teachers that knowledge and skills obtained through driver education programs aid in the prevention of accidents. The group pointed out that though it is their belief that such programs are beneficial, it is difficult to measure the programs' effectiveness by counting collisions which do not happen because of the driver's use of skills learned in such programs.

Discussion of the Recommendations

The joint subcommittee found that a review of the literature and testimony before it indicates that the effectiveness of driver education in reducing the involvement of teen-age drivers in serious crashes cannot be measured by statistics alone. The application of skills learned in a driver education program and a driver's ability to respond quickly and appropriately in a critical situation to avoid a collision are human factors that are beyond control. However, driver education programs do fulfill a need for those parents who permit their children to enroll. Though the effectiveness of these programs in teaching young people to drive safely cannot, from the data compiled, be

irrefutably established, they do expose students to essential knowledge needed on hydroplaning, expressway driving, road hazards, defensive driving and the dynamics and mechanics of the motor vehicle. Students are also made aware of necessary maintenance schedules for their vehicles and of the affects of drugs and alcohol on a person's driving ability. Though evidence shows that teen-age drivers are more often cited as "drivers in violation" in automobile accidents and of traffic ordinances and laws, the joint subcommittee believes that without driver education the statistics could be higher. The joint subcommittee also believes that the elimination of the program would be detrimental to highway safety in Virginia.

The joint subcommittee, having been apprised of the study now being conducted by the Virginia Department of Highways and Transportation Research Council on a computerized reporting system to evaluate student performance and driver education programs, recommends that data gleaned from this study be submitted to the joint subcommittee for review and analysis. The joint subcommittee believes that these data will provide the best information on Virginia-licensed teen-age drivers and state-approved driver education programs, and will facilitate a more objective evaluation of the program's effectiveness in teaching young Virginians to drive safely.

The joint subcommittee is concerned that state funding of these programs may be inadequate, thereby increasing the costs of the programs to the locality and the school divisions. It was noted that due to the economy, school divisions are experiencing considerable difficulty in obtaining vehicles because car dealerships can no longer afford to donate automobiles or to lease them to the school division at reduced rates. In addition, the cost of fuel, maintenance, and insurance have risen tremondously and contribute to the financial burden borne by the school division in providing the program. Therefore, the joint subcommittee recommends that the flow and allocation of state and local resources for driver education programs be carefully re-examined with the intent of determining the adequacy of and maximizing the efficient use of such funds.

Recommendations

The joint subcommittee recommends that:

1. High school driver education programs in the Commonwealth be continued and administered in their present form.

2. The Board of Education retain the behind-the-wheel requirement in the high school driver education curriculum.

3. The Virginia Department of Highways and Transportation Research Council submit its study "Development of a Performance Report for Use in Driver Education Evaluation" to this joint subcommittee for its consideration.

4. The adequacy and efficient use of state and local funds allocated for driver education programs be thoroughly re-examined.

5. This joint subcommittee be continued to study further the effectiveness and funding of driver education programs.

CONCLUSIONS

The joint subcommittee believes no legislative action should be taken on high school driver education programs at this time. It recommends that changes, if any, in these programs which would eliminate them or abolish any components thereof not be initiated until all relevant evidence available has been carefully studied and evaluated relative to Virginia's experience and needs, and such evidence conclusively affirms the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of driver education programs in teaching young people to drive safely.

The joint subcommittee appreciates the assistance of all persons, state and federal agencies and national organizations that provided data, personnel and expertise during its study.

Respectfully submitted,

.....
Alan A. Diamonstein, Chairman

.....
Charles J. Colgan, Vice-Chairman

.....
Elmon T. Gray

.....
A. Victor Thomas

.....
Marian Van Landingham

Footnotes

1. McGuire, Frederick L. and Ronald C. Kersh. "An Evaluation of Driver Education: A Study of History, Philosophy, Research Methodology, and Effectiveness in the Field of Driver Education," University of California Publications in Education , Volume 19, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 4-10.

2. "Traffic Safety Program Paper: Summary Report on Driver Education", U.S. Department of Transportation National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Traffic Safety Programs, May 1980, p. 1.

3. Idem .

4. Idem .

Appendices

A. Proposed Legislation

B. House Joint Resolution No. 80, 1982

C. Age of Drivers - Virginia Crashes, 1981

D. Driver Education Statistics for Public Schools, June 30, 1982

E. Driver Education Statistics for Private Schools, June 30, 1982

F. Driver Education Statistics for Commerical Schools, June 30, 1982

Appendix A

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 32

Offered January 19, 1983

Continuing the Joint Subcommittee Studying the Effectiveness and Funding of Drivers Education Programs in the Public Schools.

Patrons–Diamonstein, Thomas, and Van Landingham

Referred to the Committee on Education

WHEREAS, automative transportation affects the daily lives of a vast majority of the Commonwealth's citizens; and

WHEREAS, traffic safety is essential to the protection of human lives and personal property; and

WHEREAS, the public schools have been given the responsibility of teaching our young people to drive safely; and

WHEREAS, questions have arisen over the comparative effectiveness of public school driver education programs and those managed by commercial schools; and

WHEREAS, public testimony before the Joint Subcommittee has indicated that research is inconclusive regarding the effectiveness of high school driver education programs; and

WHEREAS, public testimony has also indicated that the funding of such programs should be re-examined; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Highways and Transportation Research Council's study to establish a computerized reporting mechanism to assist the Department of Education and local school divisions in evaluating student performance and various components of the driver education curriculum is incomplete; and

WHEREAS, data from this study and on the program's funding are essential to the completion of the Joint Subcommittee's work; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Joint Subcommittee of the House Education and Appropriations Committees and the Senate Education and Health and Finance Committees is hereby requested to continue the study of driver education in public schools.

This Joint Subcommittee is requested to complete its study in time to submit its recommendations to the 1984 Session of the General Assembly.

The cost of this study shall not exceed $3,200.

Appendix B

House Joint Resolution No. 80

Requesting the House Education and Appropriations Committees and the Senate Education and Health and Finance Committees to establish a joint subcommittee to study the funding and effectiveness of driver education programs.

WHEREAS, driver education programs are provided in the curriculum of most of Virginia's school divisions; and

WHEREAS, one of the purposes of these programs is to teach young people to drive safely; and

WHEREAS, young and inexperienced drivers are still subject to accidents which are a major cause of disabling injuries and deaths; and

WHEREAS, the effectiveness of driver education programs has been brought into question by many individuals and agencies; and

WHEREAS, school divisions are finding the cost of these programs burdensome as many local car dealerships can no longer afford to give cars to the school divisions; and

WHEREAS, the current cost of fuel and maintenance are adding to the burden of the school divisions for this program; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the House Education and Appropriations Committees and the Senate Education and Health and Finance Committees are requested to establish a joint subcommittee to study whether driver education programs are effective, whether these programs should be continued or dismantled, whether the behind-the-wheel requirement should be abolished and whether such programs, if continued, should be administered and operated in their present or some other manner. The joint subcommittee shall consist of five members, one to be appointed from the House Education Committee, two from the House Committee on Appropriations, one to be appointed from the Senate Education and Health Committee and one to be appointed from the Senate Finance Committee by the respective chairmen. The Department of Eduction is requested to assist the joint subcommittee in its study.

The joint subcomittee is requested to submit its findings and recommendations to the 1983 Session of the General Assembly.

The cost of this study shall not exceed $2,000.

Appendix C

AGE OF DRIVERS - VIRGINIA CRASHES

1981

Source: Virginia State Police

TOTAL CRASHES	Through 17	18 & Over	Total Drivers	% Under 18
Drivers in Violation	10584	101259	111843	9.5
Drivers not in Violation	4280	76288	80568	5.3
Violation info not stated	317	5252	5569	5.7
TOTAL DRIVERS	15181	182799	197980	7.7
PROPERTY DAMAGE CRASHES				
Drivers in Violation	6857	66543	73400	9.3
Drivers not in Violation	2946	50306	53252	5.5
Violation info not stated	215	3602	3817	5.6
TOTAL DRIVERS	10018	120451	130469	7.7
PERSONAL INJURY CRASHES				
Drivers in Violation	3673	33981	37654	9.8
Drivers not in Violation	1315	25576	26891	4.9
Violation info not stated	100	1586	1686	5.9
TOTAL DRIVERS	5088	61143	66231	7.7
FATAL CRASHES				
Drivers in Violation	54	735	789	6.8
Drivers not in Violation	19	406	425	4.5
Violation info not stated	2	64	66	3.0
TOTAL DRIVERS	75	1205	1280	5.9
Persons arrested for driving while intoxicated (collected through Uniform Crime Reporting Program)	815	44138	44953	1.8

Appendix D

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

DRIVER EDUCATION STATISTICS FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 1982

		State		
		Total	Male	Female
1.	Operators licenses issued this year to students with a driver education certificate			
	CITY	14,089	7,026	7,063
	COUNTY	37,460	18,905	18,555
	TOTAL	51,549	25,931	25,618
2.	Convictions of students with a driver education certificate and an operators license issued			
	CITY	973	714	259
	COUNTY	2,669	1,997	672
	TOTAL	3,642	2,711	931
3.	Percent of students with a driver education certificate and operators license issued who had convictions			
	CITY	6.9	10.1	3.7
	COUNTY	7.1	10.6	3.6
	TOTAL	7.1	10.4	3.6
4.	Accidents involving students with a driver education certificate and an operators license issued			
	PROPERTY DAMAGE	1,919	1,172	747
	INJURY	993	598	395
	FATAL	9	4	5
	TOTAL	2,921	1,774	1,147
	PERCENT	5.7	6.8	4.48
5.	Number of high schools providing program	288 - 100%		

		State		
		Total	Male	Female
6.	Number of eligible students based on tenth grade enrollment	75,827		
7.	Number of students completing the program 1980-81	59,360		
8.	Number of students completing the program 1981-82	57,616		
9.	Number of paraprofessionals teaching driver education	17		
10.	Total number of vehicles used in the driver education program	815		
11.	Number of schools offering adult and out-of-school youth programs	59		
12.	Number of students completing the adult and out-of-school youth program	466		
13.	Number of school divisions participating out of 141	141		

Appendix E

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

DRIVER EDUCATION STATISTICS FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS

YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 1982

		State		
		Total	Male	Female
1.	Operators licenses issued this year to students with a driver education certificate			
	CITY	976	536	440
	COUNTY	1,004	565	439
	TOTAL	1,980	1,101	379
2.	Convictions of students with a driver education certificate and an operators license issued			
	CITY	53	45	8
	COUNTY	63	55	8
	TOTAL	116	100	16
3.	Percent of students with a driver education certificate and operators license issued who had convictions			
	CITY	5.4	8.4	1.8
	COUNTY	6.2	9.7	1.8
	TOTAL	5.9	9.0	1.8
4.	Accidents involving students with a driver education certificate and an operators license issued			
	PROPERTY DAMAGE	81	51	30
	INJURY	36	26	10
	FATAL	1	0	1
	TOTAL	118	77	41
	PERCENT	6.0	7.0	4.7
5.	Number of private and parochial schools offering driver education programs	86		

	State		
	Total	Male	Female
6. Number of students completing program	2,316		
7. Number of teachers teaching program	115		
8. Total number of cars used in the driver education program	82		

Appendix F

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

DRIVER EDUCATION STATISTICS FOR COMMERCIAL SCHOOLS

YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 1982

		State		
		Total	Male	Female
1.	Operators licenses issued this year to students with a driver education certificate (some students applied for operators licenses after cut off period)			
	CITY	6,093	3,645	2,448
	COUNTY	2,817	1,683	1,134
	TOTAL	8,910	5,328	3,582
2.	Convictions of students with a driver education certificate and an operators license issued			
	CITY	900	730	170
	COUNTY	559	468	91
	TOTAL	1,459	1,198	261
3.	Percent of students with a driver education certificate and operators license issued who had convictions			
	CITY	14.8	20.0	7.0
	COUNTY	19.8	28.0	8.0
	TOTAL	16.4	22.5	7.3
4.	Accidents involving students with a driver education certificate and an operators license issued			
	PROPERTY DAMAGE	589	404	185
	INJURY	280	193	87
	FATAL	8	7	1
	TOTAL	877	604	273
	PERCENT	9.8	11.3	7.6
5.	Number of commercial schools approved for 1982 to conduct driver education programs for anyone under 18 years of age	58		

	State		
	Total	Male	Female
6. Number of teachers conducting programs	108		
7. Number of students completing state-approved program 1981-82	8,541		