

# Thoughts on Target Zero

Submitted by Skeet Gaul prior to the Target Zero Partner's Meeting, December 13<sup>th</sup>.

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I was recently going over some statistics from the U.S Dept. of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. I was interested in discovering where the most traffic fatalities were occurring in our country. I also wanted to see how Washington State compares. I began recording and organizing them in order: Alabama-948; Colorado-648; Indiana-914; Kentucky-782; Louisiana-760... then I started getting into the higher numbers.... Texas-3722; California-3602; Florida-3112; Georgia-1540... then tears came to my eyes as I slowly realized these were not just numbers. These were, at one time, living people... mothers, dads, children, babies, grandparents and friends. They will not be able to celebrate this special season or... anymore family experiences... or just plain "life experiences. Washington State was 25<sup>th</sup> in fatalities... right in the middle at 565. That didn't make me feel any better.

I wanted to share some of my feelings about Target Zero. As I have observed over the last several years, most of our energies and money are focused on saving lives thru improved engineering of our roadways and improving our policing. Truly, those factors can contribute to improved traffic safety... but I really feel that we are missing an equally important factor... one that has either been over-looked or ignored. And, I just don't understand. That factor is education. Not with signs and media ads... but real-life classroom education.

We determine what academic classes are important for our kids to experience in schools. Math, English, Reading, Foreign Language, Science, Art, Health, ... How many hours, weeks... years do we spend in our cars on our highways? We realize the importance of Art and Electives as life skills. But what about driving? Shouldn't that be a life skill? Shouldn't we be teaching students both the attitude and knowledge aspects of driving beginning in the early grades. We teach kids to look both ways. What if we expanded that? Just think of the potential difference it could make on Target Zero. If we could just begin putting an academic focus on the life and death skill of driving.

I realize that is a big ask, and I'm not foolish enough to think it will happen anytime soon. But I do think we could begin to include the Traffic Safety Education aspect as "the missing part" of our focus in Target Zero. Doesn't it seem logical that Traffic Safety Education should be included as a vital part of the Traffic Safety Commission? What a wonderful opportunity we have... to expand our focus in such an important and meaningful way.

I also realize that its not just a Traffic Safety Commission and Target Zero omission. I have been watching our state deal with determining a correct direction for Traffic Safety Education, itself:

1. I served on the committee to come up with a state curriculum. Instead, I believe we came up with and admirable list of concepts, but not a real curriculum. I felt that a plan was developed and pushed thru that was really not what many of us had in mind. The plan does not guide teachers or suggest how to implement the concepts, an important part of any curriculum. NHTSA has developed a curriculum based on standards acquired through years of research. Why didn't we just adopt it? We could have saved all the administrative costs. Why invent the wheel all over again?
2. I've watched the OSPI wash its hands of TSE by eliminating any meaningful funding.
3. I've watched as a department that has no focus on education, struggle to take the lead in TSE. Yes, as per the recent legislation EHB 1481, OSPI and the DOL were mandated to work together toward accountability in public school TSE programs, but I see very little OSPI influence in what has been happening. Public schools are supposed to be audited along with the commercial schools to insure excellence in TSE throughout our state, but already, we are presented with a WAC 308-108-150 proposal by the DOL that eliminates an extremely important part of any educational audit: **Integrated Learning**. One of the first things I learned when becoming a teacher was the importance of teaching and immediate reinforcement. This concept I used in all 46-years of teaching Math, English, History, Coaching and Traffic Safety... the subject matter was of no consequence. Teach and reinforce with practical application. Integrating concepts with practical application. In order for me to be

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approved for my teaching credentials, I had to demonstrate my ability to master this concept. Yet the DOL is proposing to eliminate the audit for instruction to be "Complementary and Integrated". In effect, we are given license to teach classroom lessons... and then, whenever it fits into the convenience of the student, parent or business model, the BTW section can be taught. This is pretty incredible and goes against anything I have learned in competent teaching. Can you imagine teaching a math concept and then two weeks later, requiring students to do a related work assignment? Or... a football coach teaching a new play, including blocking assignments and run patterns... and then four days later... running that play on the field? At some time..." common sense" has to prevail.

In addition, this proposed WAC also "Ceases to audit, More than 3-absences, Lessons held in contiguous weeks, permits up to 6-hours of video make-up lessons and no longer requires schools to submit local curriculum, comprehensive exam or a flow chart. I can only see that this would improve the profit or convenience of commercial schools. None of these proposed WAC changes promote "Best Practice" in Traffic Safety Education.

4. I have observed the DOL recognizing the need for direction and improvement. Correctly, they invited the **National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Technical Assistance Team** to assess our State's program and make recommendations. That team made 14-recommendations. That was in 2016. Since then, the DOL has questionably achieved two of these. Brett Robinson, from the assessment team and co-founder and Vice President for Highway Safety Services has offered to come here and help implement any two of the recommendations **for free**. Why, would the DOL not take advantage of this offer? The reason has become obvious. The DOL appears to have become influenced by other players, who may be driven by profit or other motives. How ever it has come about, these players have become a louder voice in Traffic Safety Education decisions in our state.

Because of the above observations I have made throughout my years of service to Traffic Safety Education in this state, I question the sincerity of Target Zero's ability to achieve their goal. I believe in Target Zero and in the many people involved. I will always continue to promote its goals. I just question its likely hood of being successful without Traffic Safety Education being a vital focus, as well as improved engineering of roads and policing.

Please, follow this link ... to the [NHTSA Team Recommendations](#). (See Priority Recommendations, p. 14)

Best Regards and I look forward to seeing you on Thursday...

Skeet Gaul

Classroom and BTW TSE Instructor (18-years)