

The Washington Traffic Safety Education Association (WTSEA)

A Policy Agenda to improve the Quality of Drivers on Washington's Roadways and of the Traffic Safety Education Program administered by OSPI and DOL

1. The agencies need to take a serious look at the 2016 **NHTSA Assessment of Driver Education in Washington State** and get busy implementing as many of the recommendations as feasible, and as soon as possible. Only two of the fourteen recommendations have been fully implemented.
2. **Create a uniform teacher preparation and certification system that is affordable and accessible.** This will include a trainer-of-trainer (TOT) curriculum. The training courses should be taught by certified TOT instructors who have been through training to become an approved trainer that is not based upon experience in teaching alone. The coursework should be accredited through a university such as CWU (as it is done in Oregon by WOU). Experts in teaching, teaching driver behavior, and advanced performance driver training should be involved in leading the team to develop the course curriculums and in training the instructors. **The DOL must also upgrade the teacher licensing tests so that they measure ability and knowledge in best practices for teaching driver education.**
3. **Mandate uniform standards and program rules for all TSE programs** (public/private and commercial DT schools). There is a need to make **WAC changes (and some RCW changes) to bring the two programs into uniformity.** Some issues that are not uniform are: Record-keeping requirements, BTW observation requirements, definition of simulation and of what ratio of simulation experience can substitute for BTW instruction, what constitutes an acceptable driving record regarding DUI and suspension history, parent involvement, integration of classroom and BTW instruction, etc.
4. **Require parent involvement in all TSE programs.** This includes requirements for parent attendance at a mandatory meeting/class session of at least one-hour in length. Currently, the DOL mandates that commercial DT schools offer a parent night, but does not require attendance. OSPI has no requirement for parent involvement. In addition to information about the IDL law and driving restrictions, emphasis on guided parent practice, role modeling, and a family driving contract should be required. **A minimum amount of guided parent/guardian practice**, certified by a **logbook**, should be a requirement of each course. The **logbook** should also be required to be presented to the DOL at the time for application for an initial (intermediate) driver license.
5. **We must do what we can to improve access to available and affordable TSE programs throughout Washington State.** Some kind of subsidy must be made available to low-income families to make TSE more affordable. One reason more drivers are waiting until age 18 to be licensed is because they can't afford the high cost of TSE. Let's return to the days when a portion of traffic ticket fines helped families pay for driver education.

What a concept: A violator who pays a fine for making the roads unsafe must contribute to a fund to educate young drivers, which will make the roads safer. Educated drivers are safer drivers. Let's improve access.

6. **The DOL has hired curriculum specialist, but still, neither agency has a subject matter specialist in Driver Education. It is time to restore at least one TSE specialist at OSPI.** ESHB 1481 mandates that OSPI and DOL work cooperatively to jointly develop a standardized curriculum guide for all TSE schools, statewide. But, the spirit of the statute is uniformity and quality TSE in both programs, which will take a cooperative effort going forward. These subject matter experts must have experience in curriculum development, best practices in teaching/learning, teaching driver education, advanced driving/advanced driving instruction, and administration. They should cooperate to upgrade the quality of driver education programs in Washington State, based on national standards and studies from abroad. They should guide and mentor teachers and schools in best practices in teaching driver education. The agencies cannot be focused merely on creating rules and enforcement of rules (compliance and regulation). They must focus on leadership in teaching safe driver behavior using the best practices in the field. Until we have a licensing test that measures safe driving behaviors, rather than basic maneuvers, the program staff in the agencies must coach, guide and inspire teachers and schools to focus more on driving behavior than on passing the all-too-simple licensing test. That simply cannot be the litmus test of a "good" driving school.
7. **Update the state curriculum guide (beyond listing minimum required concepts) and increase standards of evaluation required in an approved driver education course.** The objectives and assessments for course completion must, for now, exceed the minimum knowledge and skills necessary to pass the DOL licensing test. If a young driver wants to drive prior to age 18, they will need to pass a knowledge test and drive test that vastly exceeds what is required to pass the licensing test. These exit tests need to be objective and standardized throughout the state, regardless of the school the client enrolls in.
8. **Upgrade the rigor of the licensing exams** so the test is a true measure of safe driving habits. (Risk perception and management/avoidance)
9. **Pass legislation to either raise the licensing age to 17, and/or require all drivers to take driver education prior to obtaining the initial driver license, regardless of age. ("Train Past Eighteen" bill)** For adults, this education should be primarily based on individualized instruction in a vehicle.
10. **Develop a firmer incentive program for traffic offenders to take a driver-refresher/driver improvement course** that focuses on safe driving behaviors. A standard curriculum should be developed, and vendors who offer the courses should be licensed based on completing standardized training.