



PROGRAM EVALUATION DIVISION

NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Performance Measurement and Monitoring Would Strengthen Accountability of North Carolina's Driver Education Program

Summary

This evaluation examines driver education in North Carolina as administered statewide by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and conducted by local education agencies (LEAs). In response to a 2010 review by the Program Evaluation Division, the General Assembly passed reforms to the program in 2011. DPI allots over \$26 million annually to LEAs in State highway funds for driver education, supplemented by fees.

While comprehensive and generally responsive to the 2011 reform law, the DPI strategic plan for driver education lacks objectives and quantitative performance indicators for measuring program activity and effectiveness. The strategic plan for driver education should have contained statewide measures for North Carolina, for each LEA, and for each high school's driver education program within each LEA, including inputs, processes, outputs, outcomes, and efficiency measures.

Management deficiencies and lack of accountability stem from State Board of Education delegation to LEAs without sufficient DPI oversight. DPI does not collect sufficient and reliable data to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of driver education, does not have a uniform method to deliver driver education statewide, performs no monitoring of LEA instructors, and failed to conduct a valid pilot project for testing the relative effectiveness of online versus traditional instruction. DPI has not collected sufficient data on costs or student participation and has not had the capacity to use data available for measuring driver education outcomes. From 2007 to 2013, 46% of students failed the DMV test, including those making multiple attempts. LEAs are allowed to use a variety of instructional methods including contracting, yet DPI does not know which methods are cost-effective.

North Carolina's teen accident and fatality rates have declined since the implementation of graduated driver licensing but remain high. Geographic and demographic conditions contribute to North Carolina's higher teen traffic fatality rates. Nevertheless, parents and teens need to be aware of the elevated risk of traffic accidents.

To address these findings, the General Assembly should require

- statewide performance measures for driver education;
- a data-driven outcome monitoring system for student drivers completing driver education;
- a feasibility study on offering uniform online classroom driver education; and
- standards established by the School of Government at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for legislatively-directed pilot projects including but not limited to driver education.