

Georgia Driver's Education Commission

Grant Scholarship Program & Joshua's Law

Evaluation Summary

BACKGROUND

In 1997, Georgia began implementing a graduated driver licensing (GDL) system for drivers ages 15-18 years with the Teenage and Adult Driver Responsibility Act (TADRA). According to a study conducted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), TADRA was responsible for the reduction in crash rates among 16-year-old drivers in Georgia. The GDL process was later supplemented with Joshua's Law, which established the **Georgia Driver's Education Commission (GDEC)** and provided specific requirements for how driver's education will be completed among young drivers to obtain an Instructional Permit or Provisional License. The four methods available to young drivers to complete driver's education and therefore satisfy Joshua's Law are described in the table below.

Method 1	30 hours of classroom instruction at a DDS approved school	+	6 hours of behind-the-wheel training at a DDS approved school	+	40 hours of supervised driving with parent or guardian
Method 2	30 hours of classroom instruction at a DDS approved school	+	Completion of the Parent/Teen Driving Guide at a DDS approved school <i>(includes 40 hours of supervised driving with parent or guardian)</i>		
Method 3	DDS approved school online (virtual) course	+	6 hours of behind-the-wheel training at a DDS approved school	+	40 hours of supervised driving with parent or guardian
Method 4	DDS approved school online (virtual) course	+	Completion of the Parent/Teen Driving Guide <i>(includes 40 hours of supervised driving with parent or guardian)</i>		

Method 4 and Method 1 are the most commonly used methods among young drivers. Since 2016, more than half of all young drivers whose method was recorded in their driving records obtained their provisional license using Method 4 and 37 percent of young drivers used Method 1. In 2017, GDEC launched a scholarship program to assist students who want to satisfy the driver's education requirement by using **Method 1**. This tiered scholarship program is designed to financially assist priority populations, therefore maximizing participation in driver's education and training to reduce motor vehicle crashes.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this research effort was to examine the effectiveness of the GDEC scholarship program for young Georgia drivers and explore potential areas for programmatic improvements. There were four primary research objectives, focusing on differences in driving incident outcomes (e.g., crashes, serious injuries, fatalities, convictions, accumulated points on driver's license) among:

- 1 GDEC drivers and other young drivers;
- 2 Provider types used by young drivers to receive driver's education;
- 3 Methods used to complete driver's education requirements; and
- 4 Individuals waiting until 18 years of age to obtain a full license and younger drivers who go through the GDL process.



GEORGIA DRIVER'S
EDUCATION COMMISSION

7 Martin Luther King Jr Dr.
Suite 643
Atlanta, Georgia 30334
Phone: (404) 656-2769

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KEY FINDINGS

- 1 Differences among GDEC drivers and other young drivers

GDEC drivers experienced significantly fewer crashes per year and slightly higher Road Skills Test scores compared to their counterparts.

- 2 Differences among provider types used by young drivers to receive driver's education

The type of provider used to receive the driver's education instruction (i.e., technical colleges, high schools, and private/commercial providers) did not have any significant impact on driving outcomes among young drivers.

- 3 Differences among methods used to complete driver's education requirements

Method 1 had safer driver outcomes compared to the other three methods that can be used to satisfy Joshua's Law. Method 1 drivers had significantly:

- **Fewer convictions** than drivers who used all other methods,
- **Fewer crashes** than those in Method 2 and Method 4, and
- **Fewer serious injuries and traffic fatalities** from crashes than those who used Method 4.

Drivers who had behind-the-wheel training with an approved instructor (Method 1 and Method 3) were involved in fewer crashes, serious injuries, fatalities, and convictions than those who did not receive this training.

Drivers who received classroom instruction (Method 1 and Method 2) had fewer convictions than those who received online instruction.

Method 4 drivers did not have any significantly better outcomes compared to other methods.

Together, these findings indicate the following ranking of each method:

- **Method 1:** Classroom instruction with behind-the-wheel instructor hours
- **Method 3:** Online instruction with behind-the-wheel instructor hours
- **Method 2:** Classroom instruction with Parent/Teen Driving Guide
- **Method 4:** Online instruction with Parent/Teen Driving Guide

- 4 Differences among delayed individuals waiting until 18 years of age to obtain a full license and younger drivers who go through the GDL process

Delayed drivers (those who received their license after turning age 18) tended to be involved in significantly fewer crashes, serious injury crashes, and fatal crashes; however, they experienced significantly more convictions compared to the young drivers who receive their provisional license through the GDL process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the findings of this research study, there are a few recommendations to enhance the GDEC scholarship program and other driver's education programs in Georgia.

- GDEC drivers tend to have improved outcomes relative to other drivers in terms of crash rates and Road Skills Test scores compared to the non-awarded applicants. This indicates that the program is worthy of funding and support, and expanded funding might be a route to further improved outcomes among a broader portion of Georgia's young drivers.
- The study demonstrated that six hours of behind-the-wheel training with an approved instructor is more beneficial than utilizing the Parent/Teen Driving Guide. This indicates that requiring behind-the-wheel training with an approved instructor should be considered, or that the Parent/Teen Driving Guide should be redesigned to more closely reflect the benefits that are received from behind-the-wheel instruction.
- The study indicates that classroom instruction is slightly more beneficial than online instruction. As such, online instructors should examine the extent to which the approaches used in the classroom and virtual settings differ, and to consider modifying online systems to better incorporate practices used in the classroom.
- GDEC should consider making a recommendation to restructure Joshua's Law to require behind-the-wheel instruction with an approved instructor to supplement supervised driving with a parent or guardian for all methods.

Prepared by: **Strategic Research Group**

Columbus, Ohio | www.strategicresearchgroup.com

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