

TEMPORARY SPECIAL ADVISORY PANEL ON DRIVER EDUCATION

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES
COMMISSIONER DAVID J. SWARTS
CO-CHAIR, ADVISORY PANEL



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**Governor Paterson Receives Final Report From Temporary Special Advisory Panel On
Driver Education Availability and Curriculum Enhancement**
Provides Key Recommendations To Improve Teen Driver Safety and Public Health

Governor David A. Paterson today received the final report of the Temporary Special Advisory Panel On Driver Education Availability and Curriculum Enhancement. The report, which was also sent to the Legislature, provides recommendations on improving driver education and making it more available to young drivers across New York State. The report was forwarded to the Governor and the Legislature by New York State Commissioner of Education Richard P. Mills and New York State Commissioner of the Department of Motor Vehicles David J. Swarts, co-chairs of the panel.

Upon receiving the Panel's report and recommendations Governor Paterson said, "The well-being of our teen drivers and those with whom they share the road has become not only a safety issue but also a public health issue. I look forward to reviewing this report and working with the panel members, the Legislature and the other stakeholders identified by the panel to implement the report recommendations."

Motor vehicle crashes are the number one cause of death in young people ages 16-24. The majority of crashes occur during the first six months of licensed driving when young, inexperienced drivers have not yet adequately developed key driving skills and habits such as: driving attention, visual search strategies, speed relative to conditions, hazard recognition and emergency maneuvers. Young drivers account for only 12 percent of all drivers, yet they constitute 20 percent of drivers involved in crashes. They are three times more likely to be involved in a crash than the rest of the driving population. From 2004 to 2006, 32 percent of all fatalities occurred in crashes that involved drivers ages 16-24. In 2006, more than 200 young drivers in New York State died in automobile crashes, and more than 26,000 were injured. In addition to the young drivers who were killed or injured, there were 250 other fatalities and more than 41,000 other injured people as a result of crashes involving young drivers. The societal cost of young driver crashes is estimated to be \$1.16 billion annually in New York State.

In the report, the Panel points out that teen driver safety is a public health, education and safety priority. It concluded that New York must take a comprehensive, multi-pronged strategic approach that includes standards, an appropriate curriculum, use of technology, more certified driver education teachers, and making driver education available and affordable for all students. The Panel's recommendations include:

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- Pursuing a broad-based partnership to increase New Yorkers' awareness of teen driving safety as a public health priority and to support strategies that represent appropriate responses. This partnership should be inclusive of all stakeholders and include, at a minimum: state agencies, private industry, educators, local governments, community organizations and professional associations, parents/guardians, students, and law enforcement.
- Requiring the use of a standardized Driver Education curriculum in New York State based on best available research and, in addition to improving cognitive skills and hazard detection, should also focus on promoting appropriate attitudes and behaviors.
- Introducing traffic safety and hazard awareness throughout a student's education career by providing opportunities for these concepts to be incorporated into different academic subjects.
- Requiring parent/guardian involvement in local Driver Education programs.
- Ensuring that teens have more experience driving before they acquire a license.
- Expanding the use of technology (e.g. computer-based, interactive programs and simulators) where/when possible to complement training and improve hazard detection, but not substitute for behind-the-wheel driving hours.
- Convening a representative group of Driver Education teachers and representatives of national and state associations to develop strategies to support peer development, share best practices in teaching Driver Education and disseminate research findings about safe driving techniques.
- Collaborating with national experts and New York State practitioners to create a framework for quality assurance and program evaluation.
- Expanding opportunities for certified teachers to pursue completion of the Driver Education endorsement courses.
- Encouraging BOCES and community colleges to become regional providers of Driver Education programs and explore options for authorizing other organizations to provide programs, using the standardized curriculum, which meet other program standards established by the State Education Department.
- Seek options for sustainable funding of local and regional Driver Education programs accessible to all interested students regardless of income status, geographic location, disability or English language proficiency.
- Retaining local school district discretion regarding whether to provide Driver Education to its students. Re-evaluate this policy after the standardized curriculum (designed under recommendation number one) has been offered in New York State high schools for at least three years and a formative evaluation of the standardized curriculum has been completed.
- Continuing the SED/DMV partnership to pursue implementation of the stated recommendations.

In commenting on the report, Commissioner Swarts said, "Our goal at DMV is to ensure that our teen drivers are fully prepared to take on the life-long responsibility of driving. I am confident that these recommendations will help improve driver education and make driver training not only more available to our young motorists, but more appealing and useful as well. I salute the Governor and the Legislature for recognizing the importance of driver education and know that together we can affect changes in the driver education standards that will benefit all the citizens of this state."

Commissioner Mills added, "To better protect New York's young drivers we must give them more opportunities to take meaningful driver's education courses -- and to get them interested in taking those courses. The surest way to do that is to develop a high-quality curriculum. If adopted, the recommendations contained in the final report released today will do just that. The result, of course, will be improved driver safety -- not only for young drivers, but also for those who share the road with them."

Regents Chancellor Robert M. Bennett said, "It is of paramount importance that we do anything and everything we can to protect the safety of young drivers. I'd like to congratulate Motor Vehicles Commissioner Swarts for reaching out to Commissioner Mills and the Education Department. Their collaboration has resulted in a strong final report with important recommendations for improving driver education instruction."

The State Education Department and the Department of Motor Vehicles will continue to work on implementing the recommendations of the panel and will convene a meeting of stakeholders as identified in the first Panel recommendation by June 30, 2009.

Background on the Panel

In July 2008, the New York State Legislature recognized the need to examine the quality and availability of driver education and created a temporary Special Advisory Panel on Driver Education Availability and Curriculum Enhancement, which was required to report its findings to the Governor and Legislature by December 31, 2008. This panel, co-chaired by Commissioners Mills and Swarts, was responsible for making recommendations to improve driver education and ensure that instruction is more available and developmentally appropriate. The other panel members included Denise Cashmere, Schenectady County Coordinator for Traffic Safety and STOP-DWI; Marta Genovese, Vice-President of Public and Government Services and Corporate Secretary to AAA New York; Penney Silvis Gentile, Advocate for Improved and Enhanced Driver Education in NYS and concerned parent of a teen killed in an automobile crash; Dr. Clark Godshall, District Superintendent and Chief Executive Officer of the Orleans/Niagara BOCES; and Saul Lerner, Director of Athletics, Health Education, Physical Education, Driver Education and Adult Education in the Bellmore-Merrick Central High School District.

Prior to the first official meeting of the Panel, Co-Chairs Swarts and Mills identified leaders in driver safety, training and curriculum development from DMV and SED and established a working group to address the legislative charge. From July through December 2008, the working group members met on a weekly basis, reported its progress and sought direction from the Panel on a monthly basis. The Panel met on August 6th, September 18th, October 23rd, and December 8th and 18th. Further, to collect, review and assess as much data as possible, the Panel and workgroup conducted a series of community forums, interviewed experts in the areas of driver education, adolescent psychology, reviewed the pertinent research literature, and benchmarked other states that have made significant changes to their driver education programs.

Between October and November of this year, the panel held three separate public forums in Albany, Nassau and Erie counties. These forums were attended by more than 200 people and included discussions among five different groups, including: teens and youth, parents and guardians, educators and driver education instructors, law enforcement and courts, and community members. Each group explored such topics as technological advancements, driver education funding, proven methods for teaching students and current licensing requirements and restrictions on young drivers. The community input was utilized in the formation of the report presented to the Governor.

A copy of the final report is available on both the State Education and Department of Motor Vehicles websites at www.nysed.gov or www.nysdmv.com.

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