

Safety Impacts of Graduated Driver Licensing Process Changes

North Carolina's young driver licensing system, commonly known as Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL), was enacted in 1997, propelling the state into the spotlight as a national leader in teen driver safety. While GDL is effective at improving safety for teen drivers, the structure of the current GDL system necessitates multiple visits to the NCDMV, including for in-person knowledge (Level 1) and road skills (Level 2) testing. For teens who do not pass these tests on the first attempt, additional NCDMV visits are required.

This policy brief, prepared by the UNC Highway Safety Research Center, summarizes the current landscape of licensing practices for teen drivers across the United States in order to better understand state practices, their corresponding impact on safety, and how North Carolina might learn from others. Although most states and DC employ GDL systems to help ensure teens learn to drive gradually and safely, different approaches to testing have been implemented in response to state-specific needs and situations. This brief also presents research findings and policy recommendations.

POLICY CONSIDERATION: Driver License Testing

A quick summary of state-specific on-road driver license testing variations is included in Figure 1.

Key takeaways include:

- Twenty-four states allow third-party road skills license testing.
- Seven states do not offer road skills testing at the DMV, including:
 - ▶ *In AR, KY, and MO, license testing is conducted by state police or highway patrol agencies.*
 - ▶ *MS does not require license tests at all.*
- Six other states offer a waiver of the road test if certain requirements are met. (e.g., in IA, a completed driver's education program can substitute for an on-road license exam).

Research comparing the safety impacts of the different testing (or non-testing) models is limited, with no scientific evidence available to determine the relative safety outcomes.

Due to the lack of available research, an evaluation of the safety impacts of changes made to the road skills license test in NC would be beneficial.

FIG. 1: **Driver License Road Test**

(N=51, some states offer more than one option)

BY DMV

86% (44, incl. NC)

BY THIRD-PARTY

47% (24, incl. NC)

POLICY CONSIDERATION: Learner Permit Testing

Testing Format. A summary of state-specific learner permit testing variations is included in Figure 2. Key takeaways include:

- Nearly 63 percent of states allow third-party and/or online written permit testing.
- Four states do not offer written testing at the DMV.
 - ▶ In AR, KY, and MO, all driver testing is conducted by law enforcement agencies.
 - ▶ In VT, only an online test is offered.

Some states allow individuals to waive the learner permit test if certain requirements are met (e.g., KS teens do not need to take a separate DMV permit test if they pass a knowledge test as part of completing driver's education).

Proctoring. States that allow online permit testing have a variety of methods to ensure testing integrity.

- In FL and IA, online test-taking from home is allowed if proctored by a supervising adult.
- A number of states utilize the *KnowToDrive* platform, which employs photo verification, webcam monitoring, and browser lockdown technology.
 - ▶ Some states layer additional requirements; for example, OH mandates that applicants have an adult present during testing.

There is little to no scientific evidence that variations between individual states' written test procedures for a learner permit results in better or worse outcomes with regard to safety and crash risk.

Given the limited research on this topic, any changes made to NC's written permit test process should be evaluated to understand their impact on safety.

FIG. 2: **Written Test for Learner Permit** (N=51, some states offer more than one option)

DMV IN-PERSON

92% (47, incl. NC)

THIRD-PARTY IN-PERSON

43% (22)

ONLINE

35% (18)

POLICY CONSIDERATION: School Enrollment Verification

The team investigated how many states require school enrollment verification as part of the GDL system. Only 13 states (including NC) currently include this requirement. This requirement has been implemented as an assumed motivation for teens to stay in school, but a relationship between school enrollment and driving safety has not been established. In fact, our preliminary analysis does

not indicate an increased risk of fatal crashes among teens in states that do not have this requirement.

Given the lack of a demonstrated safety benefit, NC could consider removing the Driving Eligibility Certificate requirement to help streamline the GDL system.

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Visit <https://go.unc.edu/Fy47A> for full report, project information, and references.

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