Iowa High School Administrator Opinions About Graduated Driver Licensing

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Abstract

The objective of graduated driver licensing (GDL) systems is to allow young drivers to acquire driving experience before gaining full driving privileges. Modern GDL systems reduce exposure to high-risk conditions (e.g., driving with passengers, late night driving) while still allowing young novice drivers to gain the experience they need to become good drivers (e.g., Williams & Shults, 2010; McCartt et al., 2010). Because high school administrators in Iowa are directly involved with the granting of teen driving privileges through approving minor school licenses as well as waivers to the intermediate license nighttime driving limitation, their opinions about potential enhancements to Iowa’s GDL laws are of interest to policy makers. The potential enhancements considered in this survey were increasing the duration of the instruction permit phase, limiting the number of passengers for newly-licensed teen drivers, and limiting unaccompanied nighttime driving for newly-licensed teen drivers.

All high school principals in the State of Iowa were invited to participate in an online survey that asked a variety of questions related to teen driving safety in general and proposed GDL enhancements in particular. An overall response rate of 21% yielded a sample of 64 administrators that was highly representative of Iowa high schools in terms of geographic location, population density, and student enrollment.

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The results showed that:

- Nearly half the administrators report being only a little (40%) or not at all (8%) familiar with the graduated driver licensing laws in Iowa.
- Nearly two-thirds agree (38%) or strongly agree (27%) that teens in Iowa should be required to hold an instruction permit for 12 months instead of the current 6 months.
- Four out of five administrators think that newly-licensed teen drivers in Iowa should not have more than one non-family teen passenger; 60% strongly agree and another 20% agree.
- Administrators were likely to agree with changing the nighttime driving limitation for newly-licensed drivers from the current time of 12:30 am.
  - Half the administrators agreed (29%) or strongly agreed (21%) that these drivers should not drive after 10 pm.
  - About two thirds of the administrators agreed (48%) or strongly agreed (18%) with the 10 pm limit if waivers for school activities or work were offered.
  - Only 8% responded that they would not be likely to agree with a night driving limitation that began at 11 pm.

In conclusion, high school administrators in Iowa broadly support the considered enhancements to GDL. Though the respondents were quite representative of Iowa high school administrators, the small sample size is a limitation.

**Keywords:** teen drivers, supervised driving, instruction permit, passenger restriction, nighttime driving limitation

**References**