

VIRGINIA INTERVIEWS

A series of interviews were conducted with professionals in each of 60 Virginia jurisdictions. These represent a range of urban and rural locations, as well as border locations. While multiple attempts were made to reach the appropriate personnel in each of these locations, a total of 161 interviews were completed. The completed interviews were accomplished at the following levels:

DMV licensing personnel:	39
School guidance counselors:	50
Driver Education instructors:	16
Judges:	16
Police Officers:	40

This section organizes the findings according to their professional role: judges, police, DMV professionals, driving instructors, and guidance counselors.

Judges

Most judges interviewed suggested that the overall lack of driving experience among new young drivers contributed to their unsafe behaviors. Judges offered statements such as “young people have a false sense of immortality,” which often explains their willingness to “take unnecessarily dangerous risks.” Many judges interviewed believe that peer pressure, particularly when multiple youths are in a young drivers car, is responsible for much of the reckless driving. As one judge stated, “Electronics are among the primary culprits of the distractibility that impacts so many young drivers” - namely cell phones, complex CD players, portable computers and, in some cases, Internet access. Yet, most judges note that young drivers have individual personalities and judges see antisocial behavior in adult drivers as well.

Judges interviewed did observe that drinking and driving has decreased, and that there has been a sharp decline in the number of alcohol-related driving offenses involving area youth. In fact, they find that, in the words of one judge, “in cases where young drivers are cited for underage drinking at a party, they will have usually selected a designated driver among their friends who agrees not to drink for the evening and instead provides driving duties for the remainder of the group.”

Many judges report that there are fewer accidents among younger new drivers. Overall, driver’s education is seen as having done a good job, with improvement seen in recent years compared to the past. However, judges report that more violations, especially speeding, are being committed by young females than in the past. The judges interviewed also cited that young new drivers are more serious and more responsible in recent years because of the percentage of accidents in the areas in which they live. They are more knowledgeable regarding options they have in the legal system.

About parents' role, several judges stated that if parents love their children, they need to do something and not be indifferent to their driving behavior. Typically, judges want to see parents more involved in all aspects of their child's driving experience, as opposed to the all too frequent divorce of their responsibilities that often occurs when parents are no longer required to transport children to activities, work, etc. They believe that the majority of responsibility of teaching a child to drive lies with parents, and would like to make it mandatory that parents attend the ceremony/exercise when teens receive their license.

Most judges interviewed would like to see stricter DMV regulations and rules, and better driver safety education programs statewide. Some of the judges suggest that a countywide and/or statewide curfew that would prohibit driving during certain hours should be implemented for all new young drivers during the first year of having a driver's license. Judges would also like to see the implementation of a new policy that will restrict the number of passengers that young drivers can have in their car at any given time.

Most judges praised the work done by local organizations like the Kiwanis Club, MADD and SADD, who have developed programs with local schools, police departments and courts to provide driver safety education on a variety of subject areas to young drivers. They also cited the effectiveness of school resource officers and the judges' visits to schools and talks in driver's education classes.

DMV

Almost one-half of the DMV respondents interviewed reported that they noticed speed to be the leading characteristic about young people and their driving behaviors. Lack of maturity and inexperience, as characteristics of young drivers, were cited by approximately one-third of respondents. Inattention and related behaviors, such as the use of cellular phones and listening to music, were also mentioned by approximately one-third of the respondents as characteristics about youth and their driving behaviors.

The general theme from respondents that related to the concerns they have about young drivers were variables such as other passengers, inexperienced drivers, drinking and driving, and aggressive driving as the most likely contributing factors. Immaturity and showing off were also reported as concerns.

Most respondents, when asked about changes they have seen regarding young drivers in recent years, indicated that they had observed no changes. Few respondents noted that new laws were passed recently to address young driver issues. Regarding young drivers' behavior, some respondents felt that, in recent years, young drivers have not valued their licenses as they had in the past, and they are less responsible; others noted that new young drivers are using safety belts more often than before.

In general, about two-thirds of DMV respondents felt that 18- to 20-year-olds are more experienced or more mature compared to those drivers who are either 16 or 17 years old. Inversely, 18- to 20-

year-olds are also perceived, by a minority of respondents, to be more reckless drivers, while those who are either 16 or 17 years old tend to be more cautious. Only three respondents believed that both groups were the same.

More than one-half of DMV participants reported that, in an effort to prepare young drivers, classroom instruction and counseling are the two most commonly performed outreach strategies. Among other efforts, more than half of respondents also reported the presence of awareness programs, and about one-fourth mentioned police officer involvement as a major effort. Only a few respondents did not know, and others reported knowing of no other efforts being made.

Responses reflecting what DMV participants want to see in their state and their localities regarding new young drivers were raising the driving age (cited by almost one-half of respondents) and having more enforcement (cited by more than one third of respondents). Graduated licensing and increased training were common responses among almost one-fourth of respondents. Other suggestions included the use of video simulators, more parental involvement and addressing curfews. Still, five respondents offered no suggestions on the state level, and five offered no suggestions on the local level.

Guidance Counselors

When asked what they felt about young drivers, one-half of the guidance counselors interviewed said that young people tend to speed. Carelessness, recklessness and inattention were mentioned by about one-half of respondents as well. To the contrary, one-fifth of the respondents described young people as being responsible drivers.

Among the most frequently mentioned contributing factors to the previous concerns were the presence or influence of other passengers (cited by more than one-fourth of respondents). Immaturity and inexperience were mentioned by about one-third of respondents; aggressive driving and drinking while driving were also cited by more about one-third of respondents. Speeding was also reported by fewer respondents, along with showing off, the use of cellular phones, and listening to music while driving.

About one-half of guidance counselors feel that there aren't any new changes regarding new young drivers in recent years. Among those who did see changes, they mentioned the existence of more awareness programs, more cars on the road, and that younger people have become better drivers. Other changes mentioned were that cars are safer, people are using seatbelts, there is more access to cars, and that there seems to be less parental control.

Like DMV respondents, more than one-half of guidance counselors found that drivers between and including the ages 18 to 21 are more experienced and more mature than drivers who are either 16 or 17 years old. Only a very few guidance counselors pointed out that drivers 18 to 20 years old also tend to take more chances, which may be related to lack of cautiousness. Other respondents reported

that 16- to 17-year-old drivers are easily distracted, or less confident. Slightly less than one-fourth of guidance counselors characterized 16 to 17 year old drivers as being better drivers, or more cautious drivers.

As far as preparatory concerns, about one-third of guidance counselors agreed that both classroom and behind the wheel driver instruction are the two most commonly practiced efforts in preparing young drivers for the road. Counseling and affiliation with groups like SADD and MADD are also used to heighten young driver awareness. DUI checks and guest speakers were also noted as efforts being made. Awareness programs, resource officers, and workshops were reported to be additional efforts being used to prepare young drivers.

When asked about what they like to see done regarding new young drivers in their localities and on the state level, at least one-fourth of respondents wanted more enforcement from the police and judges; a similar portion of respondents demanded more training and peer programs. At least eight respondents were in favor of raising the driving age. Parental involvement, stricter policies and graduated driving licensing were also mentioned.

Driving Instructors

More than three-quarter of driving instructors noticed speeding to be the most common practice by new young drivers, and one half cited recklessness and inattention. Other driving instructors said that young drivers carry too many passengers. Contributing factors to these concerns were reported by almost three-quarter of respondents to be inattention; peer pressure, and the need to impress others were also cited as contributing factors.

About one-half of driving instructors reported that new young drivers are more aggressive and are getting worse. Several respondents also noted that along with the need to impress others, young drivers are not fully ready to drive yet.

When comparing 16 to 17 year olds to 18 to 20 year olds, almost two-third of driving instructors reported that 16 to 17 year olds tend to be less mature and less experienced than 18- to 20-year-old drivers. Furthermore, 16-17 year-olds are reported to speed as well. On the flip side, 18 to 20 year olds are reported, by more than half of respondents to want to impress others their age.

More than two-thirds of driving instructors reported using printed handouts to help prepare young drivers. Since they are driving instructors, it is not surprising that more than one-half of respondents reported that a large part of their effort lies in behind-the-wheel instruction as well. Furthermore, driving instructors noted that awareness groups are perhaps the most practiced outreach effort for educating young drivers by groups and individuals other than themselves.

When asked what they would like to see done in their localities, and statewide, more than one-half of the respondents reported that a graduated driver's licensing program, along with increasing driving age should be implemented. Other participants responded that there is a need for more training and policies, and others felt the need for increased parental involvement as well as more enforcement.

Police Officers

Almost one-half of police officers report that the number one characteristic of new young drivers is that they speed too much. Almost one-third of respondents state that young drivers are disrespectful of the law. Descriptions also indicated that young drivers are inattentive, reckless, and inexperienced.

About one-quarter of police officers reported that some of the contributing factors to the characteristics already mentioned are speeding, drinking and driving, and aggressive driving. Inexperience and inattention (especially as a result of having too many passengers, or using loud music or cell phones) were also listed by at least one third of respondents, as contributing factors. Furthermore, the need for young drivers to impress each other is also a risk that leads to poor driving.

About one-third of police officers also report that new young drivers are continuously exhibiting more aggressive attitudes toward driving. A similar portion of respondents also report that young drivers are even more inexperienced than before.

Like many other groups of respondents, more than one-fourth of police officers confirm that younger drivers who are 16 to 17 years old tend to be less mature and less experienced. Drivers who are between 18 and 20 years old are generally more mature and more experienced. With these common distinctions, however, a handful of respondents went on to note that some 18 to 20 year olds are "daredevils."

In attempting to increase young driver's awareness, almost one-half of police officers reported that they conduct high school visits as well as hand out informative literature to educate and prepare young drivers. Almost one-half of participants also cited awareness groups as the most common effort provided by other groups and individuals, along with checkpoints, which were mentioned by a smaller portion of respondents.

Regarding desired changes in their localities and statewide, almost one-third of police officers want more training for potential young drivers, and implementation of graduated driver licensing. Fewer respondents emphasized the need for more parental involvement. More than one-fourth of respondents also want the driving age increased.