

# Teaching safe driving

BY JAMES CARROLL

## How do driver's education programs differ across the states?

Statistics from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration show that new drivers are the most at-risk group on the road. In 1997, motor-vehicle crashes accounted for about one-third of all deaths of people 15 to 20 years old. Moreover, the crash rate for 16-year-old drivers was 15 times that of 20- to 24-year-olds.

States offer a diverse range of driver's education to reduce accidents by young drivers. To compare driver's education in the states, the States Information Center at The Council of State Governments collected data pertaining to as many states as possible. The following information is based on survey responses from 49 states.

As many as 30 states now require people under the age of 18 to complete some form of driver's education prior to receiving a license. Most education programs consist of at least 30 hours of classroom instruction and six hours behind the wheel. All the other states surveyed offered some type of non-mandatory driver's instruction. In addition, insurance companies often offer incentives to drivers who complete training.

Many states offer driver's education as part of a high-school curriculum. In 41 states, at least one public high school offers driver's education as part of the normal school day. In 17 of those states, however, it is left up to the local school district to offer the course.

Not every school district administers the program internally. In 26 states, school employees teach driver's education, while six states allow private entities to teach the classes. An additional 12 states offer a combination of public and private instruction. Beyond instruction, some states also

use public-private partnerships to make these classes available.

These programs are funded in various ways. Despite being a part of many schools' curricula, driver's education is not state funded for the most part. Only eight of the surveyed states completely pay for the administering of driver's education. Conversely in 20 states the fiscal responsibility rests solely on students. In 15 states, the state and the students share costs. Three other states require the local school districts to pay for the programs.

When asked about the cost of driver's education, some states provided a per student average, while others listed a line-item budget amount. The average per-student cost of driver's education was about \$122. Costs ranged from \$45 to \$421 per student, with a median of \$155 per student. The range was equally as broad among states reporting line-item amounts. One state spent \$80,000 last year, while another budgeted \$5 million for fiscal 2000.

The most common method of ensuring young drivers' safety is a graduated driver's licensing system. Twenty-four states currently have some components of this type of driver's education, which requires young drivers to meet a series of driving and education standards to have a license. Among the requirements are the successful completion of a learner's permit and the holding of a prob-

ationary driver's license for a defined period of time. The states with complete graduated driver's licensing systems are California, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio and Rhode Island.

For more information regarding this issue or others, contact the States Information Center at (888) CSG-4SIC or sic@csg.org.



*Driver's education is offered in schools in most states.*



*Most states require driver's education for young drivers.*

James Carroll is Southern regional coordinator with CSG's States Information Center.