

Driver Training Blamed For Teen-Ager Deaths

WASHINGTON, Nov. 15 (UPI) — High school driver education for teen-agers is increasing the highway death toll, an insurance industry study said today.

Laws requiring driver education as a prerequisite for getting a driver's license had no real effect on the number of 16- and 17-year-olds licensed, according to a study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, which added that the net effect of driver education was much higher involvement of teen-agers in highway fatalities.

"At least 2,000 fatal crashes per year that would not otherwise occur are attributed to increased licensure of 16- and 17-year-olds because of driver education," said Dr. Leon Robertson, co-author of the study.

The 27-state study found that 80 percent of the 16- and 17-year-olds who took driver education got licenses they wouldn't have been able to get until they were 18 or 19.

Driver Education

A RECENT survey conducted by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety indicates that driver education greatly increases the number of fatal accidents, simply because it greatly increases the number of licensed drivers. Furthermore, these drivers are in the 16-17-year-old age group and they are the single most accident prone group in the nation.

The study deals with the fatal crash involvement of teenagers per licensed drivers and per population in 27 states, as related to the proportions of teenagers who received driver education. Because of differences in reporting systems for property damage and nonfatal injuries, the research was confined to fatal accidents.

According to the report, the net effect of driver education is a much higher death rate per 10,000 population, on average, in states with greater proportions of 16-17 year olds receiving driver education. At least 2000 fatal crashes a year that would not otherwise occur are attributed to increased licensing of 16-17 year olds because of driver education.

These findings are consistent with those of a recent study in England. There, a large-scale controlled study of driver education found no difference in crashes per mile driven between groups that had various combinations of classroom, simulator and off-road training and those who had no driver education. However, the total crash involvement per person was higher among those who had 30 classroom hours and 5 hours of on-road training, apparently because they more often obtained driver's licenses and drove as a result of having been in the driver education course.

The researchers of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety concluded that it is obvious that no one should operate a motor vehicle on public roads without first learning to drive. Most of the basic skills involved in vehicle operation are usually learned easily, but the roles of length and type of experience, attitudes and physical and emotional maturity as factors in crash involvement are not well understood. The lack of effect of presently used driver education programs should not deter the search for means of improving the skills, knowledge and attitudes of drivers. However, programs aimed at such improvement should be demonstrated to be effective in scientifically designed experiments before they are adopted for widespread use.

BALTIMORE SUN, September 13, 1981, Editorial

Less Driver Education

If Baltimore county is any guide, driver education may be a luxury many local governments no longer can afford. What began as an honest effort to train youngsters to be competent behind the wheel—without any cost to them or their parents—has become too expensive for the taxpayer. Although educators have cut expenses, a new demand for fiscal austerity may finish driver training in high schools.

The Baltimore County Council last spring cut 18 teachers and \$43,000 from this year's driver education budget. In so doing the council might have unwittingly set a precedent for other fiscally strapped jurisdictions. The decision compels Baltimore County School Superintendent Robert Y. Dubel to charge students a \$25 fee if they want driver training. Some boys and girls are willing, but the courses will not carry the credit toward graduation that they have in the past.

This action was by no means the first by a political body skeptical about driver education courses. Two years ago, the General Assembly voted to phase the state out of the program at the end of the 1983 school year. The state spent close to \$3 million last year for its share of training 45,583 eligible students in Mary-

land schools. That amounts to \$65 a student. Add to that an average \$106 provided by local taxpayers, and driver education courses become quite a burden.

A pullback of state and local funding would mean thousands of youngsters going without licenses unless they pay for their training. In Maryland, as in many states, you must be 18 to get a driver's license, but are eligible at 16 or 17 if you have taken driver ed.

Still, the two-year delays could prove a blessing in disguise. In Connecticut, where public financing to train youngsters was dropped, a study showed substantial reduction in 16- and 17-year-old drivers, despite the decision by some local communities to finance their own programs. More important was the concurrent reduction, on a per capita basis, of serious auto accidents in that age group. The study was performed by Dr. Leon Robertson of Yale University for the Insurance Institute of Highway Safety and seems to support similar findings elsewhere.

The primary factor in deciding the fate of driver education has become the cost. But the accident rate among 16- and 17-year-olds is a key factor that must not be ignored.

Newark Star-Ledger, p1, 12/18/77

DRIVER EDUCATION

Study challenges record on safety

STAR-LEDGER
SPECIAL REPORT

First of a series

Barbara Malc, a student-driver at Fair Lawn High School, is taught what the gauges on the dashboard are used for by Joseph Lomonico, driver education coordinator

Photo by Francis V. Coco



By ROBERT P. KALTER

Instead of promoting traffic safety as it was intended to do, high school driver education (HSDE) is now believed to be adding to New Jersey's highway death toll.

A recently completed study by Dr. Leon S. Robertson and Dr. Paul L. Zador of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety found that driver education for teenagers greatly increases the number of licensed drivers "but is failing to reduce driver involvement in fatal crashes."

The new study examined HSDE results in 27 states, including New Jersey, where local school districts spend millions of dollars a year on hit-or-miss driver education programs that get almost no supervision from the state.

"At least 2,000 fatal crashes per year that would not otherwise occur are attributed to increased licensure of 16-17 year olds because of driver education," the researchers said.

They said the study indicates that "80 per cent of the 16-17 year olds who took driver education, obtained

licenses when they would otherwise not have obtained licenses until they were at least 18 or 19 years old."

If the licensing age were raised to 18, the study found, "the adverse effects of driver education would be removed. However, driver education would not be of any demonstrated benefit in reducing crash involvement. If driver education is continued without raising the age of licensure to 18, any possible benefits obtained from having younger teenagers learn to drive will continue to be gained at a large cost in human life."

The findings are particularly significant for New Jersey, where a new state law authorizes the issuance of a special learner's permit at age 16 to persons enrolled in a course of behind-the-wheel driver education, lopping six months from the old age limit.

Many schools, however, are finding it difficult to juggle schedules to accommodate younger students, and some driver ed instructors say they will not give behind-the-wheel training to anyone under 16½.

The legislation, which became effective in Septem-

(Please turn to Page 20)

ber, requires that each "driver ed" course be approved by the State Department of Education.

But the department has been without a driver education consultant since Sept. 15, 1975, when Paul W. Selby of Cranford was reassigned as a school program coordinator.

And Selby says there has never been a "true evaluation" of the program in New Jersey "because of a lack of records."

Studies by the federal government and others, however, have failed to produce evidence that HSDE is effective in reducing crashes. But until release of the Robertson-Zador report, none indicated an adverse effect.

The researchers said that raising the licensing age to 18 or eliminating driver education, "separately or in combination, would prevent at least 2,000 fatal crashes per year in the United States," adding that this "is a very conservative, minimum estimate."

* * *

The researchers said it is likely that driver education "has led to increased licensure because parents have been misled to believe that driver education decreased the risk of their children's involvement in crashes."

They said that apparently in states where driver education is less prevalent, parents have less often allowed children under 18 to obtain licenses.

The report added:

"Studies of practice-driving on multiple-range driving courses and of commercial schools of driver training have found resultant crash rates similar to those of students who learned to drive in high school driver education courses. There is no evidence that so-called advanced driver education has any effect on crash involvement.

"Proposals to increase motorcyclist education in high schools would likely worsen the present situation substantially. Motorcycles and mopeds (small motorcycles with pedals) have death rates per vehicle substantially in excess of those of cars. If motorcyclist education increased the use of these vehicles without reducing crash involvement to the substantial degree necessary to offset the effect of increased licensure, as driver education has done, deaths would soar."

The researchers said it was "obvious" that no one should operate a vehicle without first learning to drive.

"Most of the basic skills involved in vehicle operation," they said, "are usually learned easily but the role of length and type of experience, attitudes, and physical and emotional maturity as factors in crash involvement are not well understood.

"The lack of effect of presently used driver education programs should not deter the search for means of improving the skills, knowledge, and attitudes of drivers. However, programs aimed at such improvement should be demonstrated to be effective in scientifically well-designed experiments before they are adopted for widespread use . . .

"Programs that increase confidence that risk has been reduced, when in fact it has not, are far worse than no programs at all. Such is the case with driver education."



Photo by Richard Tashjian

Ken Murray, coordinator of driver education at Mountain High School in West Orange, gives instructions to David Gansz, 16, on an auto simulator

people who question the value of a high quality driver education course."

Those who are close to the subject lament that there are very few high quality courses available in the state's high schools.

Some individual school districts, working without direction from the state, have developed outstanding courses, but others have been described as only marginally acceptable.

"New Jersey," Selby said, "has the lowest driver ed certification in the nation."

The study was denounced by American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association as "tragically misleading."

The organization's executive director, Dr. William D. Cushman, said the report's conclusions are both speculative and selective — and are not supported by the evidence.

In their report, Robertson and Zador preferred this comment on previous studies:

"An advisory committee of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare said in 1968 that 'no one has yet produced clear proof that driver education, at least as presently constituted, has a significant favorable effect upon driver attitudes, motivations, performance or other achievements.'

"A review of driver education by the Highway Research Board of the National Academy of Sciences/National Academy of Engineering concluded in 1969 ' . . . that at the present time it is impossible to draw valid scientific inferences regarding the impact of driver education on subsequent driver behavior and performance, particularly as measured by accidents and traffic law violations.'

"A 1975 report to the Congress by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration drew similar conclusions.

"Recently in England, a large-scale randomized experimental-control study of driver education found no difference in subsequent crashes per miles driven between those groups that had various combinations of classroom, simulator, and off-road training and those who had no driver education."

* * *

Other recent studies agree that driver education is costly, perhaps the single most costly subject taught at public school.

It is also among the most popular subjects — with school kids and their parents. And it carries the approval and active support of the safety establishment, including the National Safety Council, the American Automobile Association (AAA) and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, which, ironically, employs Robertson and Zador.

Noting that critics of HDSE are few, the AAA concedes there are "sincere people who believe the cost is too high and that it takes the student's time which could be better devoted to other subjects."

There are others who question whether the state should assume responsibility for driver education, insisting this is something individuals should obtain on their own. State responsibility, they say, should be limited to testing an applicant's fitness for driving — the function of a good licensing program.

"LETTER TO THE EDITOR," DETROIT NEWS, July 11, 1979, Page 18-A.

Looking at Driver Education

In the June 26 Detroit News, John W. Porter, Michigan superintendent of public instruction, was reported as criticizing my study of driver education ("State school chief touts driver education"). In my study, driver education was found to increase early licensure of 16 to 17-year-old drivers without reducing crash involvement per licensed driver.

Porter mistakenly attributed the reduction in deaths per vehicle-miles over the last 25 years to driver education. Actually, excellent

research has found the reduction to be the result of improved roads, improved safety standards for cars, and the 55-mile-per-hour speed limit.

I believe that the adverse effect of driver education is the result of claims that it is effective, which have misled parents to allow licensure of their teen-agers earlier than they would otherwise. Porter's statements are in that unfortunate tradition.

LEON S. ROBERTSON

TODAY'S CLIPS

JUN 28 '79 PAGE 4

DETROIT NEWS, June 26, 1979, Page 4-B.

State school chief touts driver education

LANSING — (AP) — Driver education programs can promote better driving by teen-agers, despite a recent study to the contrary, Michigan Supt. of Public Instruction John W. Porter said yesterday.

Since Michigan enacted a package of traffic safety measures in 1955, including mandatory driver education for those under 18, Porter said auto fatality rates have dropped from 7.1 persons killed per

100 million miles of travel to 3.08 persons killed.

He said that the number of vehicles, drivers and miles has doubled since 1955.

Porter criticized a recent study by a Yale University professor and a statistician from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. The study showed teen-agers who take driver education have no

better driving records than those who don't.

State Board of Education surveys show that less than 5 percent of the state's driver education graduates are involved in accidents or violations during the first three years after completing the program, Porter said. He also cited an insurance company's study in favor of driver education.

Is Driver Education Program Enough?

WASHINGTON (NEA) — In the years since World War II, it has become a ritual element of American life: The teen-ager comes home from high school one day and requests his or her parents' permission to enrol in the school's driver education program.

The parents readily agree, assuming that the course is far superior to either the commercial instruction offered by driving schools or the blind-leading-the-blind alternative of learning from a friend or relative.

The teen-ager, however, often has a hidden agenda: In many states, 16- and 17-year-olds can be licensed to drive only after successfully completing a driver education course. Others must wait until 18, and for an adolescent, that additional year or two can be an eternity.

(In Tennessee, a 16-year-old can obtain a driver's license, regardless of whether he has had driver education. However, having had driver education generally means lower insurance rates — THE EDITOR.)

But now a Washington-based safety organization with impeccable credentials has produced a meticulously researched study conclusively demonstrating that the driver education-early license approach leads to thousands of unnecessary highway fatalities each year.

Even more startling, the authors of the study conclude that even if early licensing is eliminated, high school driver education "would not be of any demonstrated benefit in reducing crash involvement."



In Washington
Martha Angle and
Robert Walters

The study of the effect of driver education in 27 states during the late 1960s and early 1970s was conducted by Drs. Leon S. Robertson and Paul L. Zador.

Both are affiliated with the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, a highly respected independent organization that has been in the forefront of efforts to improve the nation's roads, cars and drivers.

The care with which the study was done is demonstrated by the state-by-state adjustment of the computations to take into account two relatively obscure factors that contribute heavily to fatal crashes — rural roads and wet pavements.

Robertson and Zador even considered the possibility that accident rates might be higher among 16- and 17-year-olds because they are new and inexperienced drivers.

But the research demonstrated that the rate of fatal crashes among those who didn't take driver education courses and waited until 18 or 19 to be licensed differed little from their early-licensed peers who had the benefit of two years' experience.

(Connecticut, Delaware, Iowa,

Maine, Maryland, Michigan, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Washington are among the states that issue early licenses to graduates of driver education courses.)

In 1975, approximately 4000 drivers who had not reached their 18th birthday were involved in fatal crashes. In about half of those accidents, only one car was involved — thus eliminating the possibility of blaming the "other driver" or some other external factor.

"Parents have been misled to believe that driver education decreased the risk of their children's involvement in crashes," the authors conclude. "The estimate of 2000 fatal crashes that would be prevented (annually) if persons under 18 were not licensed in a very conservative, minimum estimate."

Robertson and Zador properly refuse to go beyond their data, stating that "physical and emotional maturity as factors in crash involvement are not well understood." But that may indeed be the key to the disproportionate number of auto accidents involving young drivers.

Caution, a sense of their own limitations, an understanding of the unpredictability of others' behavior and an awareness of their mortality simply are not among most teenagers' assets.

At the risk of alienating those for whom securing a driver's license is an important part of the rites of passage to adulthood, we would suggest the conclusion is obvious: Licenses should be restricted to those 18 and older — with or without a driver education course.

*Leon - Washington Post coverage
June 19, 1980 p. A6.*

Number of Teens on Road, Accidents Seen Increased by Driver Training

By Celia W. Dugger
Washington Post Staff Writer

When Connecticut cut driver training courses from its budget in 1976, the teen-age accident rate changed dramatically. It went down.

A Yale researcher attributed those startling results to numbers. Driver training courses increase the number of 16- and 17-year-olds who are on the road, and—driver training or no driver training—they get in a lot of accidents.

Connecticut prohibits 16- and 17-year-olds from driving unless they have completed driver training or have their parents' permission. And parents, researchers believe, are tough to convince. "I suspect that parents may worry that their 16-year-old is not mature enough to drive, but driver education may convince reluctant parents that it's all right," said Leon S. Robertson, author of a study of the Connecticut driver education situation.

Each year more than 3.5 million high school students nationwide take driver ed at a cost to the public of more than \$300 million dollars. Of those Connecticut drivers who hit the road on their 16th birthdays, one in five will be in a crash by his or her 18th birthday, according to Robertson.

"The question is whether the taxpayer ought to be charged for a program that increases the probability of death and injury," he said.

The study by the Center for Health Studies at Yale compared communities in Connecticut that eliminated driver ed with those that continued to offer courses financed locally. Robertson totaled up the number of "years" driven by 16- and 17-year-old motorists.

In communities that eliminated the course, the number of "years" driven by this age group dropped 57 percent, and the total number of crashes dropped by 63 percent.

In communities that continued the program, the accident rates did not change, Robertson said.

State governments currently provide about 95 percent of the funding for driver education. The federal government provides the rest. Since the inception of federal support for state programs in 1967, the federal government has invested \$114 million in driver education, says Dewey Jordan, chief of program operations at the Traffic Highway Safety Division of the Transportation Department.

The federal government paid for, among other things, teacher training and what the driver and pedestrian education division of the Transportation Department calls simulators and multiple car driving ranges.

A multiple car driving range "looks like a large parking lot but it isn't," says Gary Butler, highway safety management specialist in the division. "It's pavement and has traffic lanes. There may be as many as 10 or 12 cars interacting on it at the same time," he said.

Leroy Dunn, director of the Transportation Department's driver and pedestrian education division, dismissed the results of the study as obvious. Naturally, he said, there will be more accidents if there are more drivers on the road. "If you teach someone to cook, they'll cook. If you teach someone to drive, they'll drive. Driver education is the best method I am familiar with for training people to drive," he said.

The preliminary findings of a study sponsored by Dunn's division may undercut his assertion that driver ed produces better drivers. After eight months of studying 18,000 students in Georgia's De Kalb County, the division has found that while driver ed students had fewer traffic violations than students who had not taken the course, there was "no difference" in their accident rates, said Clay Hall, the De Kalb project director.

The Yale study also has produced consternation at the Washington lobbying headquarters of driver education teachers group, which is supported by a long list of corporations, prominent among them major automobile and insurance companies.

William Cushman, the director of the American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association, says he has not yet seen Robertson's study, but that he will be coming out with a criticism as soon as he obtains it. The study is published in the June issue of the American Journal of Public Health.

Another group, also financed by insurance companies, is more sympathetic to the study's findings. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety provided Robertson with a grant for his study.

"I don't think that the public is well served if it thinks that driver education will reduce death and injury, because it won't," says Ben Kelley, senior vice president of the institute.

Many of the insurance companies that support the institute, however, also give substantial rate breaks to individuals who take driver ed. They say individuals who take the course are better risks.

Driver Education for Teen-Agers Seen as Cause of More Accidents

By DAVID WESSEL

NEW HAVEN — A Yale University researcher says high school driver education courses lead to more accidents, not fewer, because they encourage 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds to get driver's licenses.

Leon S. Robertson of Yale's Center for Health Studies reports that after the General Assembly cut funding in 1976 for local high school driver education classes, there were fewer accidents involving teen-age drivers in towns that discontinued the classes.

In the June issue of the American Journal of Public Health, Robertson compares statistics for nine school systems that dropped driver education with nine that kept it despite the legislature's action.

"In communities that eliminated high school driver training, the reported crashes (per 100 16-year-old and 17-year-old residents) ... decreased 63 percent from 1975 to 1978, compared to no change in communities that retained the course," said Robertson, whose work was financed by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

By law, a person between 16 and 18 can get a driver's license in Connecticut only after completing a high school or commercial driver training course or presenting a certificate signed by a parent, guardian or spouse older than 18 who has trained the teen-ager.

In towns where high school driver education was dropped, teen-agers generally did not take the other options, but waited until 18 to get a license, Robertson found.

In Connecticut, about one in every five drivers who gets a license at age 16 will have a crash causing injury or more than \$400 in property damage before his or her 18th birthday, he said.

"Persons who take high school driver education are often found to have fewer reported crashes per licensed driver than persons trained by other means — and this is true in Connecticut — although it is not necessarily the training that makes the difference," Robertson said.

But the overall numbers of crashes involving teen-age drivers is primarily determined by the percentage of teen-

Driver Education Linked To Accidents Among Teens

Continued from Page 1

agers with licenses. And where high school driver education isn't offered, fewer teen-agers get licenses.

Robertson said his findings, supported by research done elsewhere, raise the question whether 16-year-olds or 17-year-olds should be allowed to drive at all.

"Many state laws do not allow persons less than 18 to vote, sign contracts, play pinball machines and the like, and yet persons apparently considered insufficiently mature for such activities are licensed to assume responsibility for operating vehicles that so commonly kill and maim," he said.

Those in favor of licensing the teen-agers argue that "the mobility afforded these young drivers is worth the price," he said.

"That contention is a subject worthy of far more intelligent public debate and decision than it has thus far received," Robertson wrote.

The school systems in Robertson's study that dropped driver education were Bridgeport, Cromwell, East Haven, Middletown, New Haven, New London, Portland, Waterbury and Region 13 (Durham and Middlefield).

Those that kept the courses were East Windsor, Hartford, New Britain, Norwalk, Putnam, Shelton, West Hartford, Wethersfield and Region 18 (Lyme and Old Lyme).

Driver education end led to fewer mishaps

By DAN KAFERLE
Staff Reporter

The elimination of driver-education programs in nine state school districts in 1975 led to a significant decline in the number of serious accidents involving 16- and 17-year-olds over a three-year period, a Yale researcher has found.

Leon S. Robertson of Yale's Institution for Social and Policy Studies reported in the June issue of the American Journal of Public Health that the curtailment of state-supported driver education in the school districts drastically affected the number of teen-agers who received driver's licenses. The net result was a corresponding decrease in the number of the age group involved in serious accidents.

Robertson said the study does not attempt to evaluate the content of the driving programs. He said it does, however, show that availability of the programs makes it easier for a member of an age group that is statistically more prone to serious traffic accidents to obtain a driver's license.

"If you expose more people to a hazard, more people will get hurt," he said.

Robertson's report is based on a study of statistics of high school dis-

tricts that dropped driver education when state funding was discontinued in 1975 and nine school districts that continued the program with local funds or by increasing fees.

The districts that continued the program — East Windsor, Hartford, New Britain, Norwalk, Putnam, Shelton, West Hartford, Wethersfield and the combined district of Lyme and Old Saybrook — represented about 17,000 teen-agers in the 16- to 17-year-old range.

Those districts dropping the program — Cromwell, East Haven, Middletown, New Haven, New London, Portland, Waterbury, Bridgeport and a combined region of Durham and Middlefield — represented about 18,200 16- and 17-year-olds.

The survey defined a serious crash as one that involved personal injury or property damage of more than \$400.

The study found that the elimination of the programs in the nine districts led to a "substantial reduction" in early licensing, and that 73 percent of those who would have been eligible for the driver-education program if offered by their school district waited until they were 18 before becoming licensed to drive.

(Please turn to page 2)

NEW HAVEN REGISTER, page 1
June 12, 1980

End of driver education led to fewer accidents

(Continued from page 1)

The number of students who completed the full high school course from all the school districts declined by 9,400 students during the period, while the issue of new licenses — including those

received through home or commercial instruction — declined by 5,652. The communities that scrubbed the program experienced a 13 percent increase in licensing through home or commercial instruction over the period.

The licensing of 16- and 17-year-olds decreased by 57 percent during the three-year period in the districts that eliminated the program, while there was a 9 percent decrease in the districts that kept the program.

In communities that eliminated high school driver training, a 63 percent reduction in serious accidents involving the age group was reported. The districts that kept the program did not experience a reduction in the crash rate.

Based on his study, a similar British experiment and earlier research on the subject done in 27 states, Robertson concluded that "driver education in high schools is a major contributing factor to the early licensing of teen-agers to drive and as a result of this early exposure, their increased involvement as drivers in serious crashes."

Robertson said the study raised a "question of moral philosophy" whether taxpayer funds should be used for something that increases the risk of injury to someone.

He said that statistically it has been proven that the 16 to 17 age group has a higher accident rate per miles driven mainly because of age (maturity) and lack of experience.

"Many state laws do not allow persons less than 18 to vote, sign contracts, play pinball machines and the like, and yet persons apparently considered insufficiently mature for such activities are licensed to assume responsibility for operating vehicles that so commonly kill and maim," Robertson said.

"In Connecticut, with one of the lower serious crash rates among the states, about one in five drivers licensed to drive on their 16th birthdays will be the driver of a vehicle in a crash causing injury or more than \$400 in property damage before their 18th birthdays.

"Proponents of early licensure have argued that the mobility afforded these young drivers is worth the price. The contention is a subject worthy of far more intelligent public debate and decision than it has thus far received."

C-12

To save lives, money and energy:

High school driver education should be abolished

By MICHAEL J. McMANUS

ASSUME it were possible to cut state and local taxes by \$300 million, reduce your auto insurance costs substantially, slash the need to import millions of barrels of OPEC oil, eliminate countless auto accidents and injuries, plus save the lives of 3,500 people in 1981 alone.

All those goals could be achieved at no cost. What's needed is simply to raise the age at which a person can get a driver's license from 18 to 19, but not one state has done so. Instead, 14 states have raised the age at which liquor can be bought. New Jersey moved from 18 to 19, Massachusetts and Maine to 20, and Illinois and Michigan from 18 to 21. But even in Michigan, there was only a 5% drop in accidents. That's helpful, but not overwhelming.

So why not consider moving the driving age up to 18? We don't believe adolescents' judgment is sound enough for them to vote, sign contracts or bet on a horse race. Yet we blithely gamble every time we hand them the car keys.

Unfortunately, there are too many losers in the gamble. The death rate among American adolescents and young adults is rising sharply—in stark contrast to all other age groups. Between 1960 and 1978, while the overall U.S. death rate plunged 20%, it shot up 11% among young people. And the leading cause of deaths among those aged 15 to 24 is motor vehicle accidents.

What's more tragic, of course, is that over half of those killed in accidents involving teenage drivers are not the drivers themselves—but innocent vic-

tims hit by the teenagers, or those riding with them.

For years, we've heard the statistics on those killed over holiday weekends, and our minds numb to it all. Over the New Year's Day weekend, there were 560 deaths on the highway. And if past trends hold up, 16- to 17-year-olds were responsible for a disproportionate number of them—8%, although teenagers are only 3.3% of all drivers.

Why has there been no move to push up the age of licensing? A large and very effective lobby has misled parents, school boards and administrators, state legislatures and the U.S. Congress. Who? Teachers of driver training. They have led the public to spend \$300 million annually to give driver training to 3 million high school students a year on the theory that the training would make them safer drivers. Nice theory, but it's wrong. Dead wrong.

THREE MAJOR STUDIES prove that driver training leads to more—not fewer—accidents and deaths for a simple and profound reason. "High school driver education leads to increased numbers of licensed teenagers, which in turn increases the total crashes for that age group," says Dr. Leon Robertson of Yale University. He looked at the statistics of 27 states that require driver training before granting a license at ages 16 or 17. What he found was that many teenagers would not have gotten their licenses before 18 if driver training had not been available. A subsequent study in Connecticut provided further, conclusive scientific proof.

In 1975, Connecticut discontinued state aid for driver ed. Middletown, Waterbury and six other towns dropped the program as a result. But Norwalk,

New Britain, Hartford and others simply added more local funds to retain the program. Between 1975 and 1977, there were 7,580 fewer students being licensed when driver ed was dropped in eight communities; however, some 1,928 got trained by their parents or commercial firms. But what's important is that three quarters of those "who could be expected to have been licensed if they had taken high-school driver education waited until they were 18 or older to be licensed," said Robertson's study.

And reported crashes involving those 16- and 17-year-olds plunged 63%. There was no comparable change in Norwalk, New Britain, etc., where driver ed continued.

What those numbers prove is that adolescent peer pressure to drive can be overcome by parental pressure forbidding premature driving—if schools have got the guts to cut out a program which has some support. Such courage is rare.

After reading the report, National Highway Traffic Safety Administrator Joan Claybrook said: "We now require driver ed as part of highway safety programs, but I am recommending that it be deleted. Whether it will see the light of day in the new administration remains to be seen."

Robertson deserves the last word: "It makes no sense in any public philosophy I know of—whether Democratic, Republican or Socialist—to expend the taxpayer's money to increase his risk of being killed or injured or of having his property damaged by a teenage driver."

(Michael J. McManus is a Connecticut-based writer specializing in Northeastern affairs.)

"The teenage driver controversy"
CHICAGO TRIBUNE, November 12, 1982,
Section 1, page 10

NEW HAVEN, Conn.—Every time the Connecticut driver education study is mentioned in a newspaper, letters that distort the results arrive from driver educators. So it was with Richard P. Ovington's Voice of the People letter that says Connecticut took "the driving privileges away from 16- and 17-year-olds." The state did nothing of the sort.

Many people are worried about why Johnny can't read. Apparently, his driver education teacher has a problem in that department as well.

Connecticut stopped funding high school driver education with taxpayers' money, and nine communities dropped the course from their curricula. The students could still be licensed by certification that they had been trained by an adult licensed driver or by a commercial school. Nevertheless, in three of every four cases, the students or, more likely, the parents decided to wait until age 18 for the youngster to begin driving. The result was a big drop in auto accidents of 16- and 17-year-olds in those communities.

Driver education increases the licensure of 16- and 17-year-olds but several studies indicate that it does not reduce auto accidents per licensed driver. Drivers in that age group kill two other people for every one of them who dies. What philosophy of public policy can tolerate the taxpayer being charged to support a program in the public schools that increases the taxpayer's risk of being killed, not to mention nonfatal injuries and property loss?

Ovington interprets the fact that 82 percent of 16- and 17-year-old drivers in fatal accidents have no prior convictions for violations as evidence that they are "good and responsible drivers." Since they killed themselves or someone else that is a silly view.

The obvious point is that identification of beginning drivers by court records is not possible because they get in serious trouble before they develop a record.

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