

Insights on Novice Driver Education and Training

State Laws Addressing Driver Education Content and Instructor Requirements in Graduated Driver Licensing Systems

Driver education is a longstanding strategy for introducing young drivers to the basics of safely operating a vehicle and reducing the risk of teen driver crashes and injuries.¹ Although there is inconclusive empirical evidence about the efficacy of driver education in reducing crash rates, it is generally accepted that there needs to be some kind of introductory course before new drivers begin practice driving.² Despite every state offering some form of driver training, course hours, curriculum, and course format (in school, at home, or virtual) vary widely state by state.

States that have limited options, like requiring classroom education to be completed in person through a private driving school, may create unintended barriers for families who have financial limitations or live far away from approved course locations. Additionally, driving schools seeking to offer courses for multiple states face a large variety of licensing and instructor requirements state-to-state. Expanding options for driver education to include blended and virtual education options can ease burdens on families and address issues in operating driving schools and providing enough in-person instructors to meet student demand. Additionally, parent-taught driver education courses may help to shift responsibility to parents and integrate driver training more seamlessly into the practice driving component. As states seek to offer these options to novice drivers, state law must adapt to include flexibility for virtual, home, and blended driver education options.

This policy report analyzes driver education requirements that are codified in state law. Additional provisions may be in place via informal licensing agency policy, practice, or guidance documents.

¹ NHTSA, *Pre-Licensure Driver Education*, Countermeasures that work, <https://www.nhtsa.gov/book/countermeasures-that-work/young-drivers/countermeasures/unproven-further-evaluation/pre-licensure>.

² *Id.*

Driver Education Curriculum

Driver education is made up of two primary components: a classroom course and behind-the-wheel (BTW) instruction. This structure originated in the 1940s, when driver education was developed as part of high school curriculum to promote safe and efficient use of vehicles.³ Historically, the classroom component has focused on rules of the road, while driving skills are taught during on-the-road training with a driving instructor.⁴ The intention of a driver education program is to equip new drivers with knowledge and skills to handle a variety of driving scenarios, and to give new drivers the training necessary to pass a driving examination before licensure.⁵ Traditional driver education is focused on equipping students with basic skills, and there is little documented impact that driver education programs alone are decreasing teen crash rates.⁶ However, expanding driver education and training with new technology and evidence-based strategies that address risk-taking behavior, hazard perception, and parent involvement may lead to improved traffic safety outcomes.⁷

As of December 31, 2021, 30 states required classroom instruction.⁸ An additional 15 states require classroom instruction but offer a waiver or different training option as an alternative to completing the requirement.⁹ For example, Nevada offers a waiver of classroom training for new drivers who live more than 30 miles from a training location and requires these new drivers to complete additional supervised driving practice instead.¹⁰ In the remaining five states and D.C., classroom instruction is voluntary or merely encouraged for new drivers.¹¹

³ National Commission on Safety Education, National Education Association, *High-School Driver Education: Policies and Recommendations*. Washington, D.C.: The Commission, 1950.

⁴ Dennis F. Thomas, Richard D. Blomberg, and Donald L. Fisher, *A Fresh Look at Driver Education in America*, Apr. 1, 2012, <https://doi.org/10.21949/1525711.1>.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Supra* note 1.

⁷ *Supra* note 4.

⁸ CPHLR (March 17, 2025). “Driver Education, Training, & Testing”. LawAtlas.org. LawAtlas.org/datasets/driver-education-training-and-testing. Note that these data reflect state statutes and regulations in effect as of December 31, 2021.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Neb. Rev. Stat. § 483.2521.

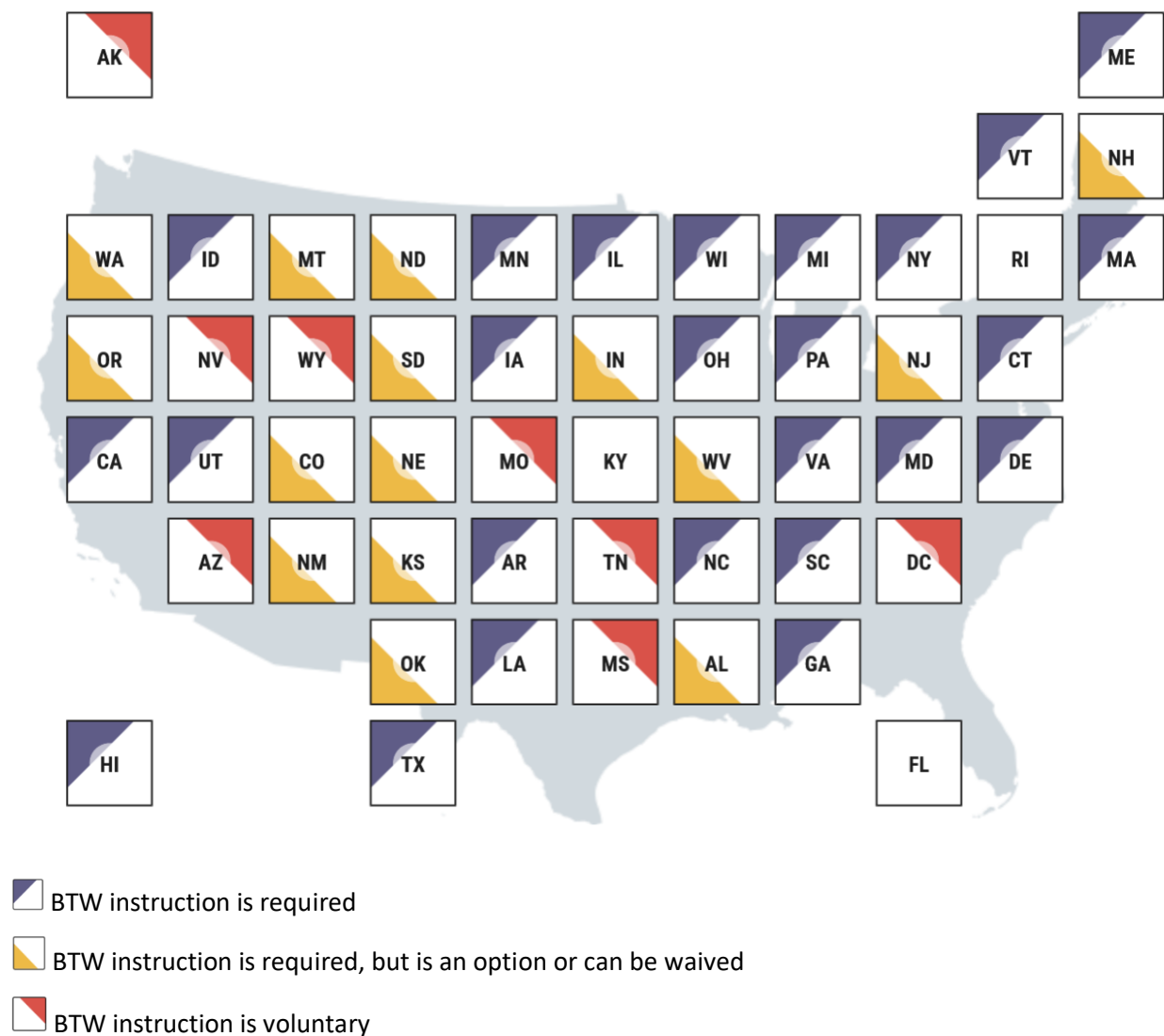
¹¹ *Supra* note 8.

[illegible]

- As of December 31, 2021, 25 states required BTW training.¹² Fifteen states required BTW training as an option or with a waiver, and 8 states/jurisdictions offer voluntary BTW training.¹³ An example of optional training is in New Jersey, where BTW training is only required for drivers who hold a permit before age 17 as part of the early path to licensure.¹⁴ Students in New Jersey who choose not to complete BTW training follow a different path to licensure.¹⁵

3

Figure 2: BTW instruction requirements as of December 31, 2021



Driver Education Hours

Most commonly, driver education programs include 30 hours of classroom instruction and 6 hours of BTW instruction.¹⁶ However, the most recent version of the Novice Teen Driver Education and Training Administrative Standards (NTDETAS) published in 2023 by the Association of National Stakeholders in Traffic Safety Education encourage states to adopt 45

¹⁶ *Supra* note 1.

hours of classroom instruction and 10 hours of BTW instruction.¹⁷ Only West Virginia and Montana require more than 45 hours of classroom instruction, while Arkansas, Maine, New Hampshire, Virginia, and Massachusetts require 10 or more BTW hours.¹⁸ The following tables show the number of classroom hours and BTW hours required by jurisdiction.¹⁹

Table 1. Minimum classroom driver education hours required by jurisdiction

Minimum Classroom Hours	<i>n</i>	Jurisdictions
54 hours (60 hours combined total between classroom and BTW, with minimum 6 hours BTW)	1	MT
50 hours (66 preferred)	1	WV
33 hours	1	RI
32 hours (Minors' driver education courses); 56 hours (offered through the state virtual network)	1	TX
30 hours	28	AL, AR, CA, CO, CT, DC, GA, ID, IL, IN, IA, ME, MD, MA, MI, MN, MS, NV, NH, NJ, NC, ND, OR, VT, VA, WA, WI, WY
30 hours, but differs based on age or type of school	6	DE, HI, LA, NM, OK, SC
24 hours	1	OH
20 hours	1	NE

¹⁷ Association of National Stakeholders in Traffic Safety Education, Novice Teen Driver Education and Training Administrative Standards, <https://anstse.info/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/001-NTDETAS-May-2023-Edition.pdf>.

¹⁸ *Supra* note 8.

¹⁹ *Id.*

18 hours (In-person); 30 hours (Home-study/ online)	1	UT
8 hours	1	KS
5 hours	1	NY
4 hours	2	FL, KY
Not specified	6	AK, AZ, MO, PA, SD, TN

Table 2. Minimum BTW hours required by jurisdiction

Minimum BTW Hours	<i>n</i>	Jurisdictions
12	1	MA
11.7 (14 periods of minimum 50 minutes each)	1	VA
10	3	AR, ME, NH
8	4	CT, DC, LA, OH
7	2	NM, TX
6	23	AL, GA, HI, ID, IL, IN, IA, KS, MD, MI, MN, MS, MT, NJ, NC, ND, OR, SC, UT, VT, WV, WI, WY
6 but differs in certain circumstances (e.g., type of driving school, parent as instructor, simulator substitution, etc.)	4	CO, DE, OK, WA

5	1	NE
3-6 depending on licensing pathway	1	CA
Not specified	8	AK, AZ, MO, NV, NY, PA, SD, TN
N/A	3	FL, KY, RI

Subjects Covered in Driver Education

Most states outline state-specific driver education curriculum standards.²⁰ While some states specify required subjects in statute or regulation, some only reference standards or require state approval. For example, Maryland refers to curricula approved by the administration but does not elaborate on specific standards.²¹ Two states reference national standards in their law: Alaska allows for “courses certified by a nationally recognized organization specializing in driver training for non-commercial motor vehicles” and Tennessee allows for course certified by a “recognized regional or national accrediting agency.”²² The NHTSA Highway Safety Program advises that the classroom portion of driver education provides instruction in basic and advanced driving techniques for handling emergencies; rules of the road; critical vehicle systems; vehicle, highway, and community features; signs, signals, and highway markings and highway design features; and pedestrian safety.²³ The following table indicates the subjects that are covered by state laws, with subjects that mirror NHTSA’s recommended curriculum highlighted.

²⁰ *Supra* note 8.

²¹ COMAR 11.23.01.07.

²² 2 AAC 91.080.

Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. 1340-01-13-.07.

²³ NHTSA, Highway Safety Program Guideline No. 4, <https://one.nhtsa.gov/nhtsa/whatsup/tea21/tea21programs/pages/DriverEducation.htm>.

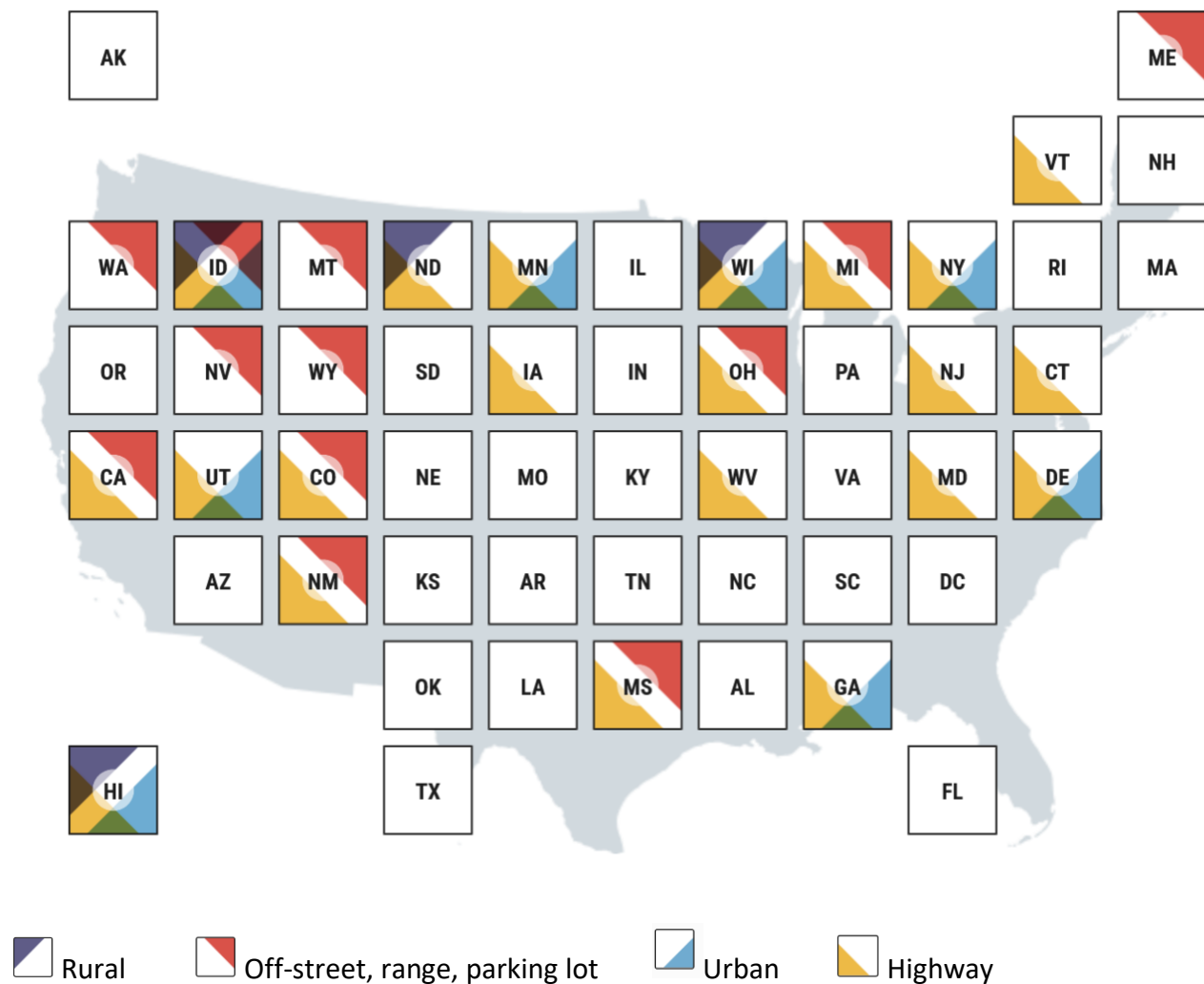
Table 3. Number of states requiring curriculum element with NHTSA recommendations highlighted as of December 31, 2021

Driver Education Curriculum Subject Required	Number of Jurisdictions
Impaired driving	33
Distracted or drowsy driving	22
Rules of the road	37
Defensive driving	24
Driving in inclement weather and/or bad road conditions	15
Strategies for driving in various environments (e.g., rural, cities, highways)	6
Vehicle safety and maintenance	26
Safety of vulnerable road users (i.e., pedestrians and cyclists)	25
Insurance/financial literacy	11
Legal responsibilities (e.g. post-crash procedures, what to do during a road stop)	13
Emotional/psychosocial aspects of driving	20
Fuel economy	3
Organ donation	17
Other/Safe driving practices	40

There is little specified in state law about required curriculum elements for the BTW component of driver education. States that do have training specifications in law and regulation mainly focus on what types of driving environments learner permit holders should receive training in. For example, in North Dakota drivers must receive training in residential, business,

and gravel road surfaces.²⁴ Minnesota has a more general requirement for students to have “safe interactions with commercial motor vehicle traffic.”²⁵ Other states like Pennsylvania specify that students should do their first few hours of training in an area free of traffic and other pedestrians, removing some of the risks of novice driver training.²⁶ Like classroom instruction, BTW curriculum often is specified in state standards and not in law and regulation.

Figure 3: BTW training required instruction environments as of December 31, 2021



²⁴ NDAC 37-13-05-02

²⁵ Minnesota Rules, part 7411.0515

²⁶ 24 P.S. § 2834

Driver Education Instructors

Although each state sets its own unique combination of requirements that driver education instructors must satisfy, many requirements are commonly adopted across states. State law often requires driver education instructors to fulfill various requirements to receive a license, including meeting a minimum age requirement, satisfying minimum training and/or education standards, passing a competency exam, completing a background check, and/or maintaining a clean criminal record, and possessing a valid driver license and/or maintaining a satisfactory driving record.²⁷ Additional requirements that are less commonly adopted but may still be required for instructor candidates include meeting a minimum driving experience requirement, completing continuing education for renewal of an instructor license, satisfying a residency requirement, and complying with alcohol and/or drug restrictions.²⁸ The table below summarizes the requirements for driver education classroom instructors in all 51 U.S. jurisdictions.²⁹

Table 4. Requirements for driver education instructors by jurisdiction

Requirement	<i>n</i>	Jurisdictions
Minimum age	35	AK, AZ, CA, DE, D.C., FL, GA, HI, ID, IL, IN, KY, LA, ME, MD, MN, NE, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT, VT, VA, WA, WI
Minimum training or education	44	AL, AK, AZ, CA, CT, DE, FL, GA, HI, ID, IL, IN, IA, KS, KY, LA, ME, MD, MI, MN, MS, MO, MT, NE, NV, NH, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, OK, OR, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT, VA, WA, WV, WI, WY
Minimum driving experience	10	D.C., HI, LA, ME, NH, NY, PA, SC, VA, WI
Continuing education	22	AZ, CA, CT, FL, HI, ID, ME, MD, MI, MN, MT, NE, NV, NM, NC, OH, OR, TX, UT, VA, WA, WI
Pass competency assessment	28	AK, AZ, CA, CT, D.C., FL, GA, IL, KY, ME, MD, MN, NE, NV, NH, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, OR, PA, SC, TN, UT, VT, WA, WI

²⁷ *Supra* note 8.

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.*

Satisfactory driving record/valid license	45	AK, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DE, D.C., FL, GA, HI, ID, IL, IN, KS, KY, LA, ME, MD, MA, MI, MN, MS, MT, NE, NV, NH, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT, VT, VA, WA, WV, WI
Background check/clean criminal record	36	AZ, CO, CT, DE, D.C., FL, GA, HI, ID, IL, IN, KY, LA, ME, MD, MA, MN, MT, NE, NV, NH, NJ, NC, OH, OK, OR, RI, SC, TN, TX, UT, VT, VA, WA, WV, WI
Alcohol and/or drug use restrictions	11	D.C., FL, GA, HI, ID, IL, KY, MD, MT, NC, OR
Mental competency/physical ability	28	AZ, CA, CT, D.C., FL, GA, HI, ID, IL, IN, KY, LA, ME, MD, MN, NV, NM, NY, NC, OH, OR, PA, TN, UT, VT, VA, WV, WI
Good moral character	23	AK, AZ, CA, CO, CT, GA, HI, IL, IN, KS, KY, MA, MI, MN, NE, NV, NM, NY, NC, OH, OR, RI, TN, WA
Residency requirement	6	AZ, D.C., HI, IL, LA, NV
Oral communication skills	4	D.C., HI, KY, VA
Other	8	D.C.*, IN*, KY*, MS*, NY*, OH*, OR*, RI*
None/not specified	2	AK, ND
N/A	0	
<p>*D.C.: May not be covered by diplomatic immunity; may not be employed by agency that forbids its employees from operating a public vehicle for hire; may not be an employee of the Department of Public Works whose employment involves issuing licenses</p> <p>*IN: Currently employed by licensed driver training school</p> <p>*KY: Instructor may not have any job duties relating to the issuance of driver licenses</p> <p>*MI: Competent traffic citizen, both when teaching and in personal life</p> <p>*NY: Commissioner can give exceptions to requirements</p> <p>*OH: May not engage in conduct dangerous to students, have inappropriate contact with a student, or have sexual or harassing communication with a student. Must pass probationary instructor license term.</p> <p>*OR: Must have current first aid and CPR certification</p> <p>*RI: Valid teacher's certificate</p>		

Most state laws address a set of requirements for both classroom and BTW instructors, but some states have adopted stricter licensing processes for BTW instructors working directly with students in vehicles. If a state has implemented a law that requires BTW instructors to fulfill different requirements, BTW instructors may be required to satisfy more stringent physical ability and minimum driving experience standards.

Multi-state providers and driver education instruction shortages

Driver education instructor shortages are becoming increasingly prevalent across the country.³⁰ This shortage may have a substantial impact on novice drivers' ability to complete the training required to obtain a permit or provisional license in many states.³¹ Contributing factors include an aging workforce, insufficient funding for competitive instructor salaries, and challenges to completing the required training.³² Additionally, strict certification requirements—such as lengthy residency requirements—may pose a barrier to addressing these instructor shortages, especially for new residents to a state who wish to obtain an instructor license. Multi-state driver education providers may help alleviate these shortages,³³ but instructor certification requirements that are perceived as too stringent may hinder instructors' ability to meet the necessary standards in multiple jurisdictions.

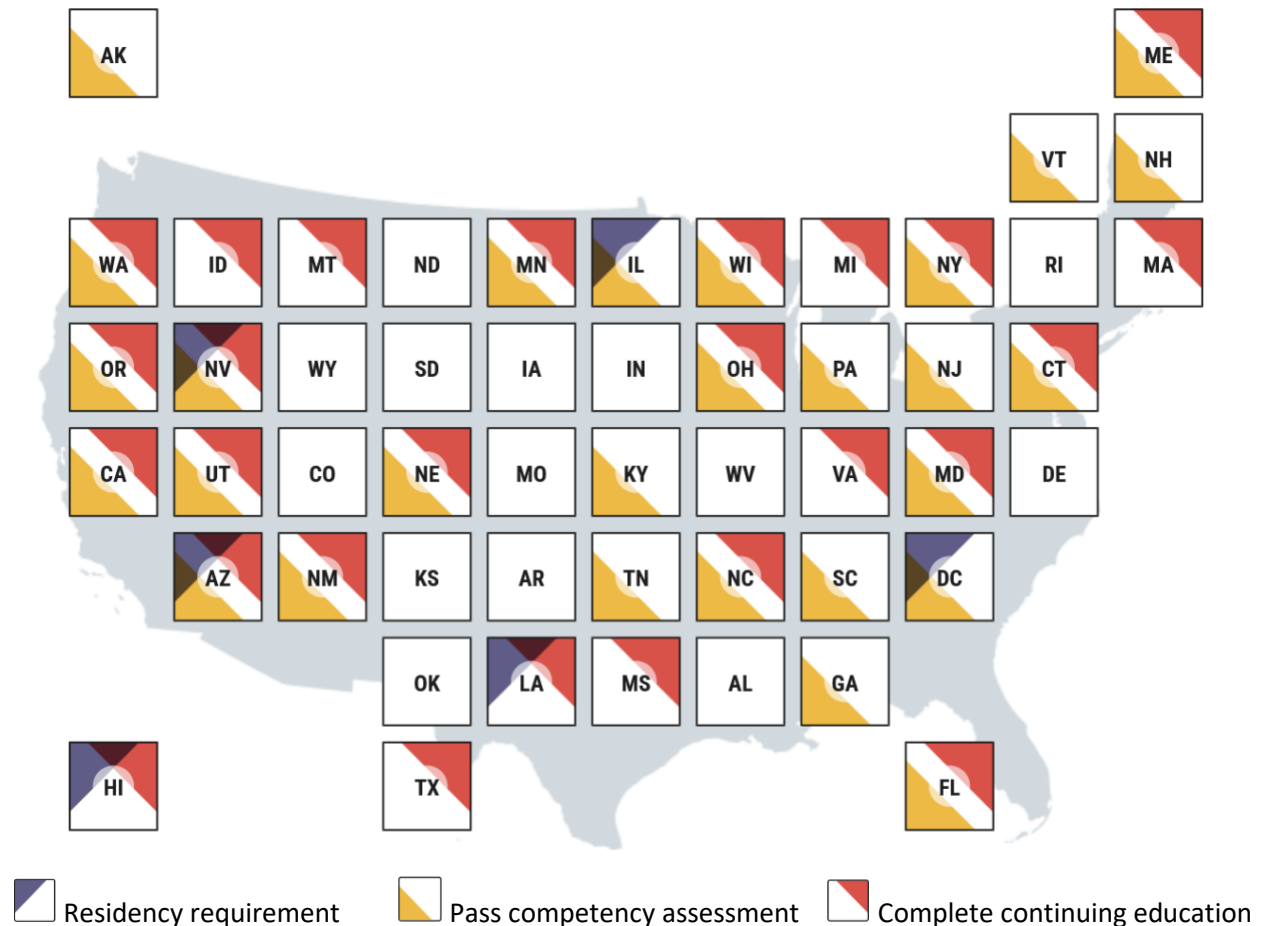
³⁰Rolando Hernandez, Why Oregon is seeing a shortage of driving instructors, July 12, 2023, <https://www.opb.org/article/2023/07/12/why-oregon-is-seeing-a-shortage-of-driving-instructors/>; 3 News Now Omaha, *Nebraska chapter of National Safety Council concerned over driver education instructor shortage*, Jan. 24, 2023, <https://www.3newsnow.com/news/local-news/nebraska-chapter-of-national-safety-council-concerned-over-driver-education-instructor-shortage>; Phil Howard, *Montana driving instructor shortage shows improvement, but challenges persist*, April 10, 2024, <https://nbcmontana.com/newsletter-daily/montana-driving-instructor-shortage-shows-improvement-but-challenges-persist>; Dominic Minadeo, *Scarcity of driver education instructors delays students' ability to get their licenses*, Oct. 31, 2022, <https://vtdigger.org/2022/10/31/scarcity-of-driver-education-instructors-delays-students-ability-to-get-their-licensesefbfbfc/>.

³¹ Dominic Minadeo, *Scarcity of driver education instructors delays students' ability to get their licenses*, Oct. 31, 2022, <https://vtdigger.org/2022/10/31/scarcity-of-driver-education-instructors-delays-students-ability-to-get-their-licensesefbfbfc/>.

³² Upper Michigan's Source. (2023, September 13). 'The expenses can be outrageous': Why driver education can be hard to find in the U.P. WLUC-TV. <https://www.uppermichiganssource.com/2023/09/13/expenses-can-be-outrageous-why-driver-education-can-be-hard-find-up/>.

³³ Cynthia Corsetti, *Driving disruption: Nigel Tunnacliffe of Coastline Academy on the innovative approaches they are taking to disrupt their industries*, Authority Magazine, Jan. 24, 2024, <https://medium.com/authority-magazine/driving-disruption-nigel-tunnacliffe-of-coastline-academy-on-the-innovative-approaches-they-are-e663b4158f0b>.

Figure 4: States that require classroom instructors to satisfy a residency requirement, pass a competency assessment, and complete continuing education as of December 31, 2021



Potential Innovative Solutions

State law can also play a role in addressing driver education instructor shortages. For example, Delaware has promulgated a regulation that addresses instructor reciprocity requirements.³⁴ This regulation allows instructors who have been licensed in other states but do not otherwise meet the requirements for a Delaware Driver and Traffic Safety Education Teacher Standard Certificate to satisfy less stringent requirements.³⁵

³⁴ 14 Del. Admin. Code, §1553, 5.0, <https://regulations.delaware.gov/AdminCode/title14/1500/1553.shtml>.

³⁵ *Id.*

Additionally, state laws that permit the use of alternative methods of driver education to satisfy a driver education requirement can help overcome potential barriers to obtaining a license and address the growing number of jurisdictions experiencing instructor shortages. For example, laws permitting virtual classroom instruction may enable fully virtual, instructor-led courses; asynchronous or correspondence-style courses without a live instructor; or hybrid instructor-led models.³⁶

Figure 5: States that allow classroom instruction to be completed virtually or remotely as of December 31, 2021



³⁶ *Supra* note 8.

State laws may also establish parent-taught driver education courses that can be used to satisfy a driver education requirement or recommendation. There is growing support for involving parents in the driver education and training process, as parents play a key role in assessing their child's progress and ensuring they are ready to navigate the roads safely.³⁷ Iowa authorizes a "teaching parent" to instruct students in an approved driver education course as an alternative to completing a course offered by a traditional course provider.³⁸ The teaching parent must possess a valid license and have maintained a clean driving record for the past two years, in addition to being certified by the Department.³⁹ Additionally, in 2023, the Idaho legislature passed a law to allow students to complete virtual classroom instruction and permit parents with a clean driving record to teach the driving component of a driver education course through the Parent-Student On-Road Driver Training course.⁴⁰ This program is designed to increase access to driver education for individuals who live in rural areas or outside districts that offer formal driver education programs.⁴¹

³⁷ B Simons-Morton & M C Ouimet, *Parent involvement in novice teen driving: a review of the literature*, 12 Injury Prevention 2006 12 (Suppl I), i30-i37 (April 20, 2006), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2563441/pdf/i30.pdf>, Bruce Simons-Morton, *Parent involvement in novice teen driving: rationale, evidence of effects, and potential for enhancing graduated driver licensing effectiveness*, 38 J. Safety Res. 2 (March 2007), 193-202, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0022437507000291>.

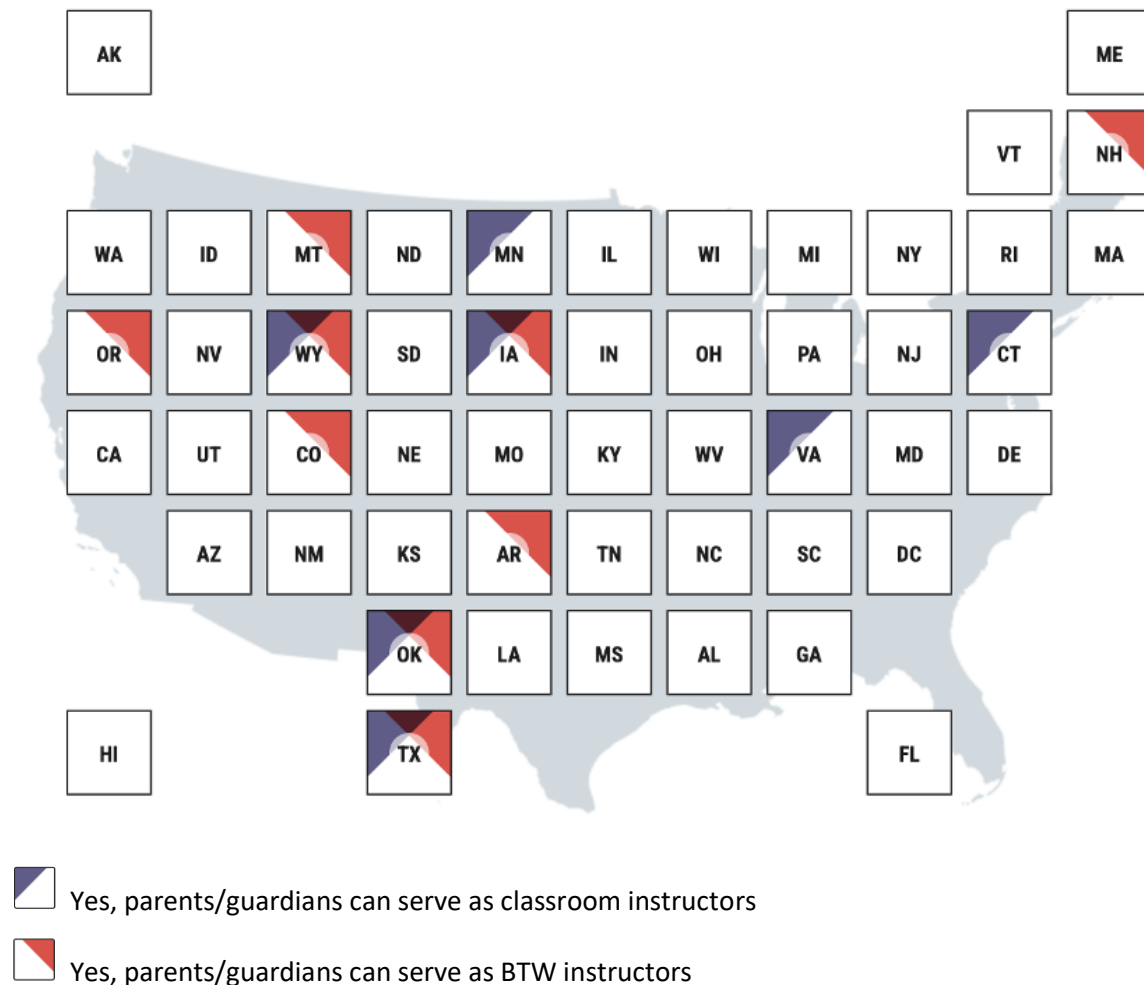
³⁸ Iowa Admin. Code r. 761-634.11, <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/iac/rule/761.634.11.pdf>.

³⁹ Iowa Code § 321.178A, <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/321.178A.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Idaho Code §49-307(7)(a), <https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/title49/t49ch3/sect49-307/>.

⁴¹ *Id.*

Figure 6: States that allow parents-guardians to serve as driver education classroom and BTW instructors as of December 31, 2021



Conclusion

As state laws adapt to innovations in driver education, novice drivers may have new opportunities to succeed in GDL programs. Innovative approaches to driver education and training may contribute to the overall effectiveness of state-mandated driver education in reducing teen crash rates and may open doors for students who have faced barriers to driver education in the past.

This report was prepared by Kathryn Feeley, J.D. expected '25, Legal Assistant; Katherine Schutes, J.D., Research Assistant; and Kerri McGowan Lowrey, J.D., M.P.H., Associate Director for Grants & Research of the Legal Resource Center for Public Health Policy at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law. This work was supported, in whole or in part, by Cooperative Agreement Number 693JJ922RQ000096 awarded by the U.S. Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department of

Transportation or the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The United States Government assumes no liability for its contents or use thereof. If trade or manufacturers' names or products are mentioned, it is because they are considered essential to the object of the publication and should not be construed as an endorsement. The United States Government does not endorse products or manufacturers.