



# Project Summary

Texas Department of Transportation

## 0-5657: Assessing the Effectiveness of “Teens in the Driver Seat” Program in Texas

### Background

Nationwide, approximately 6,000 teens die in vehicle crashes **each year** – that is the equivalent of a commercial jet full of teens crashing to the ground once per week – costing the U.S. \$41 billion dollars per year. It is, far and away, the number one killer of teens in America and accounts for 70 percent of teen injury deaths.



Students in the El Paso ISD Announcing Their TDS Program

To combat this growing problem, The Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) developed an innovative program entitled “Teens in the Driver Seat” (TDS), in which researchers have enlisted teen drivers themselves in the first peer-to-peer driving safety program of its kind. TDS involves the target audience (teens) directly to help develop and deliver the right messages. Early indications suggested that the idea is working, as TDS has taken root in several different parts of Texas, with several others reaching out to TTI staff for help in addressing a problem that kills more than 500 teen drivers and passengers in Texas each year.

The goal of this research project was to assess the effectiveness of the TDS program in Texas.

### What the Researchers Did

The researchers performed a series of attitudinal surveys, field studies, and personal interviews to assess the potential impacts of the TDS program on teen awareness of top driving risks and teen driving behavior. Surveys were conducted at 11 different high schools in Texas, with a grand total of 2,820 surveys being completed.

Website use statistics for [www.t-driver.com](http://www.t-driver.com) – the website where a number of tools and materials are posted and available to aid teens in their deployment of the program – were also examined to determine how and to what extent this program resource is being used.

### Research Performed by:

Texas Transportation Institute (TTI),  
The Texas A&M University System

### Research Supervisor:

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### Researchers:

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### Project Completed:

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## What They Found

Analyses indicate awareness of the common risks (other than “drinking and driving,” which is already very high) has improved 40 to 200+ percent, while field studies indicate seat belt use is an average of 11 percent higher and cell phone use/“texting” is 30 percent lower at “program schools” as compared to a control group of schools at which the program has never been deployed.

Website traffic for [www.t-driver.com](http://www.t-driver.com) has increased over 1,500 percent in the past 18 months, with a current average of 20,000+ hits per month and an average duration of time spent at the site having doubled this year to a current level of 8 minutes. Personal interviews indicate the program is popular with teens, and that they feel the peer-to-peer approach is productive and serves a number of beneficial purposes for them. Researchers also discovered that teens in rural areas are much more likely to take part in high-risk driving behavior – namely speeding, using their cell phone, and “texting” while driving.

## What This Means

There is considerable evidence that the TDS program is having a positive influence through improving awareness of the top risks faced by teen drivers, as well as improving their driving behavior. The program also is showing increasing popularity among teens. As such, continued expansion of the program in Texas appears worthwhile.

Future development and deployment of the program should, where and when possible, focus special attention on outreach to teens in the rural areas of Texas, as these teens appear to be in particular need of the program.

### The Top 5 Risks Faced by Teen Drivers

- Driving at Night
- Distractions
- Speeding
- Low Safety Belt Use
- Alcohol and Drugs

#### *For More Information:*

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