

# DRAFT REPORT

## Parent Awareness of Alaska Drivers' License Programs



Prepared By:



# **Parent Awareness of Graduated Drivers' License Program and Future Messaging Strategies**

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## BACKGROUND

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Almost 1 in 5 fatal and injury crashes in Alaska involve teens, confirming that young drivers continue to be disproportionately involved in motor vehicle crashes. While we celebrate that the Alaska Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP): 2018-2022 indicates that the five-year average of young driver fatalities has decreased from 13 in 2011 to 6 in 2018, the marked increase in young driver fatalities and serious injuries from 48 in 2015 to 87 in 2016 is alarming. Speeding fatalities from 2013-2017 were second highest for the 16-24 year old age group.

UNSAFE BEHAVIOR (Seat Belt, Impaired, Distracted Driving - cell phone use and Speeding):

- Results from the 2019 Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) indicate there is continued work to be done to improve unsafe driving behavior by Alaska youth.
- Results of the survey show that 83.5% of Alaska high school students most of the time or always wore a seat belt.
- Similarly, in May 2019, Safe Alaskans observed 83.8% seat belt use rate during lunchtime at 8 Anchorage high schools.
- While those that report driving when they have been drinking has decreased to 4.3% for traditional high school students in 2019 (compared to 5.6% from the YRBS, 2015), a startling 12% reported that they drive when they have been using marijuana.
- Further, there is a marked difference between the percentage who drove after drinking at traditional high schools versus alternative high schools (4.3 versus 7.9). This may warrant outreach with alternative schools throughout the state.
- Over 14% reported riding in a vehicle driven by someone who has been drinking alcohol, which has steadily increased from 13.1% (2013 YRBS). This is an important new focus area for young driver safety initiatives.
- Furthermore, data from the 2019 YRBS indicates that distracted driving continues to be a transportation safety issue as over 37% of young drivers in Alaska drove a car while talking on a cell phone, and at least 29% texted or emailed while driving on at least one day in the 30 days before the survey.
- By sex, 28.4% of males and 31.1% of females report texting and emailing while driving. (Due to COVID, the YRBS scheduled for 2021 was cancelled.)

LOCAL DATA: In 2019, 60% of crashes involving drivers under 20 were caused by driver error. Of those, 32% were caused by aggressive driving. The majority of the others, where cause was known included failure to yield to a red light, improper lane change and turn and failure to yield. In 2018, there were 193 distracted driving related collisions, impacting 563 people with 123 injuries; 103 aggressive driving crashes, impacting 232 people, injuring 58 people including 2 fatalities; and 503 speeding related collisions, impacting 1308 people with 10 fatalities.

The Alaska DMV does not refer to its driver's license program as the GDL but does have both learner's permit and provisional components. The SHSP points to Safe Alaskans and the DMV to promote and educate young drivers and parents on Alaska's GDL law. The Highway Safety Countermeasure Guide cited parent involvement as a crucial component and effective strategy. Based on qualitative and quantitative data from Parent Focus Groups conducted in FFY22 by Safe Alaskans, Safe Alaskans will educate parents by expanding upon the campaign we develop in FFY22.

Possible topics for the GDL Education Campaign will be based on results of the FFY22 focus group and the FFY22 telephone survey but may include night-time driving hours, hours of supervision, and restrictions around passengers. We will also help parents understand their responsibilities when they supervise their young drivers and provide guidance to build their confidence and skills as driving supervisors. Parents have said they trust information they receive from DMV and doctors. DMV is on board to collaborate. And we will reach out to PTAs and physicians who perform student athletic physicals as another place for dissemination.

Use key-informant interviews to help discern where parents get information related to the Alaska Graduated Drivers Licensing program, where best to get info, sources they trust, what help is needed, opinion of program

- What information do they need?
- 77% said they would go to DMV for GDL information.
- 74% not at all familiar
- 62% didn't know how many hours young drivers need
- 10% knew when teens can drive

# PROJECT RECRUITMENT

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## ***Groups:***

The Center for Safe Alaskans recruited from a network of parents with teenagers who fit in to two distinct groups of young drivers:

- **GROUP ONE:** Parents with a 16/17-year-old with a driver's license or with a learner's permit soon to get a driver's license, Alaska residents.
- **GROUP TWO:** Parents with a 13/14-year-old with a learner's permit or soon to get a learner's permit, Alaska residents.

The two groups were selected so that the interviewers could assess the awareness and utilization of the Alaska driver's license (ADL) program by parents already using the system for teenagers with a driver's license (DL) or a learner's permit (LP) and those who are just beginning their journey toward a LP and eventually a DL.

## ***Referral Networks***

Recruitment was done primarily through referrals and existing connections with other parents, although the interviewers were only personally familiar with 2 of the 16 parents interviewed.

## ***Demographics***

Due to the nature of the referral networks, 2 demographically different groups emerged during the interview recruitment process and were mixed throughout groups one and two outlined above. The first set of parents were geographically located in Northeast Anchorage and had teenagers attending East and Bartlett High Schools, the second set of parents lived primarily in South Anchorage and had teens in South, Service and West High Schools. All parents had at least one teenage child, with many of the parents having more than one in that age range. Several had blended families with children ranging from babies to mid-twenties.

## ***Methods of Contact***

Connections were made through text message and email, with the interviewer first establishing eligibility and then securing availability and scheduling a phone interview.

# INTERVIEW SESSION DESIGN

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## ***Interview Approach***

- Prior to the interview, parents were asked for their verbal consent to participate in the interview and were given a general background on the purpose of the interview.
- Participants were given the opportunity to opt in or opt out of being recorded. All but two of the participants consented to being recorded.
- The interviewer took notes on 2 distinct notes templates (located in **ATTACHMENT A**) and these notes were the only place where personal identifying information was collected. This information has since been removed from the notes.
- In the introduction, each parent gave the ages of their children and indicated where the child was in the “Alaska driver’s license process.” (Getting LP, had LP, has provisional DL, has full DL)
- One interviewer led most of the questioning, asked follow up questions and took handwritten notes.
- Questions in both GROUP ONE and GROUP TWO were organized in the following four areas:
  1. Awareness of DL stages and process
  2. Existing resources for parents and teens
  3. Challenges in getting a LP or DL
  4. Effective and impactful messaging

## ***Session Design***

The initial questions were designed to gauge the parent’s level of knowledge and participation in their child’s DL/LP journey. As the session progressed, questions became more focused on the parent’s use of existing resources available for those either getting their LP, being supervised as a holder of a LP, or those who recently received a provisional license (PDL) and who were subject to the restrictions of the PDL.

## ***Discussion/Question Design:***

The questions and discussion topics were designed to gain information that will lead to a powerful media campaign to educate parents on the LP and PDL in Alaska. For a social marketing effort to be effective, the designers need to carefully define and then listen to the target audience. In particular, understanding what motivates the audience, as well as what can de-motivate them is critical. This means understanding the

challenges they are experiencing what barriers they are running in to during the process of helping their child become a driver.

***Understanding Perceptions and Beliefs:***

Finally, understanding whether the audience believes it can engage in the desired behavior and whether it wants to engage are keys to designing the message. To this end, questions were designed to elicit key emotional triggers for parents, perceptions about the ability of parents to influence teens, motivators, and de-motivators for parental action and what they think will be effective. Once a campaign strategy is created, a final question to answer is where to place messages.

## THEMATIC ANALYSIS APPROACH

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The information collected during these interviews was analyzed using a modified thematic analysis approach.<sup>1</sup> The researchers analyzed the interviews using a review and consensus approach.<sup>2</sup> The evaluation of the information was conducted by reviewing and implementing the steps outlined in Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis method, modified to meet the time and capacity needs of the researchers. Once the interview sessions were completed, the analysis began with:

1. **Familiarization** – Once interviews were conducted, the researchers reviewed their notes, familiarizing themselves with the data and the information gathered.
2. **Generating themes** – The researchers then identified common themes that emerged throughout the interviews.
3. **Reviewing themes** – Once these themes were identified, the researchers discussed each emerging theme.
4. **Defining and naming themes** – Once agreement on the emerging themes and their definitions was reached, the themes were labeled.
5. **Creating the report** – Notes and themes were reviewed from the interview and consensus sessions. These notes, as well as quotes from the interviews to support key insights, were used to create this report.

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Braun & Victoria Clarke (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3:2, 77-101, DOI: [10.1191/1478088706qp063oa](https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa)

<sup>2</sup> USAID, (1996), *Performance Monitoring and Evaluation TIPS*, USAID, Retrieved from: [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/pnaby233.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnaby233.pdf)



# THEMATIC ANALYSIS

## Familiarization



Once interviews or focus groups are conducted, the researchers review their notes and familiarize themselves with the data and the information gathered.

## Generating Themes



The researchers then identify common themes that emerge throughout the interviews or focus groups.

## Reviewing Themes and Consensus



Once these themes are identified, the researchers discuss each emerging theme and reach consensus.

## Defining and Naming Themes



Once agreement on the emerging themes and their definitions is reached, the themes are labeled.

## Create Report



Notes and themes are reviewed from the interview and consensus sessions. These notes, as well as quotes to support key insights, are used to create this report.

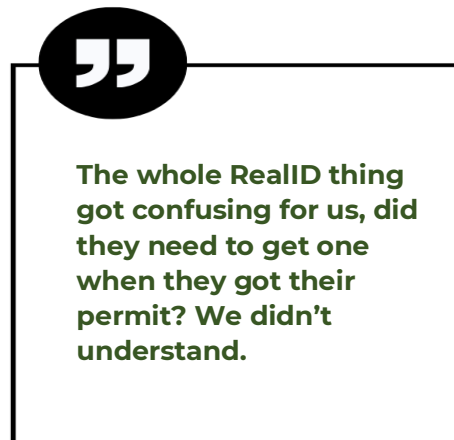
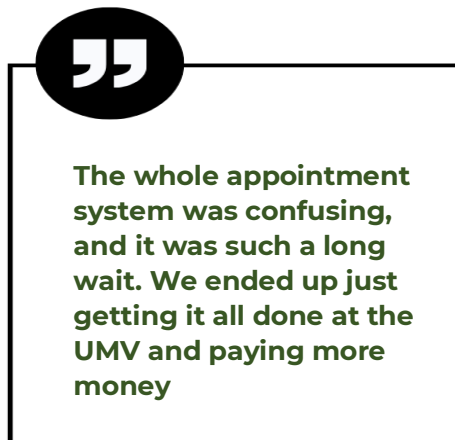
## SUMMARY OF KEY INSIGHTS

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- **USING THE DMV WEBSITE AND GOING TO THE DMV**– The DMV website was used by most parents and teens as their first step in getting information on both the Learner’s Permit and Driver’s License. Parents in general said the website worked well for them and that it was easy to navigate, while others said it wasn’t clear they needed to make appointments and they couldn’t find what they were looking for. Several said the website was confusing and that it was challenging to find resources for their teens and for parents who were supervising new drivers.



Another point of confusion for a few parents was the Learner’s Permit and the RealID, and whether the child needed to get the separate ID during the permitting process at the DMV. The proliferation of driving apps was also mentioned as a point of confusion, there were several that looked like the official Alaska DMV app, but then turned out not to be. It was difficult to distinguish whether there was an approved app. Providing simple, clear, direct, easy to find and informative materials on the website and at the DMV for both parents and teen drivers should be a primary focus in any awareness campaign and messaging strategy.



- **APPROVE AND APPRECIATE THE PROVISIONAL LICENSING RESTRICTIONS**

- The majority of parents interviewed approved of and appreciated the restrictions placed on new drivers through the provisional license program used in Alaska. Many stressed the importance of safety and having no distractions as a new driver and felt that the rules placed on new drivers through the State were effective and justified. However, several interviewees indicated they were confused and unfamiliar with the restrictions and rules, as well as the penalties for breaking the rules, and said they would appreciate if the messaging was clearer for both parents and teens. One parent asked for a one-pager or a brochure on the PDL program and the rules so that they could reference it as their teen began driving alone.

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**It keeps me from having to be the mean parent!**  
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**I think the two-year process is great, starting at 14 and practicing with a parent with you. I think messaging should focus on encouraging kids to get their permits right away at 14 so they have more time to practice and learn. Especially to learn about driving in Alaska.**  
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**I think it's (Provisional Licensing Program) a great idea. Just because they get to learn there are steps to accomplishing things, everything doesn't happen at the speed of a TikTok video. You have to wait sometimes.**

“  
**I do have a suggestion.... especially with the bus situation in Anchorage, the restrictions on who can ride in the car are making things very difficult for my family. Are there exceptions and where do we find information about those, and where can I find clarification about the penalties for breaking the rules?**  
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- **DRIVING SCHOOLS AND DRIVERS' EDUCATION PROGRAMS** – Parents in one of the demographic groups identified (South Anchorage) often enrolled their children in driving schools as an alternative to handling the LP supervision themselves. This was much less common in the other demographic network, where many of the parents expressed a wish for a Driver's Ed program in the schools or an affordable alternative. It was clear throughout the interviews that there is an equity issue in accessing high-quality training and supervision for new drivers.

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There used to be a stipend for families that couldn't afford driving school for those enrolled at ASD, but that's gone away too.

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If the State is really trying to promote safety among new drivers, if that is really their goal, then driver's ed should be back in the schools. Make it consistent and available to everyone, not just those that can afford it.

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I wish there was driver's education in the schools. I'm finding that my only option is a driving school, which is \$880. My daughter says there is a room at East High School with driving simulators, but it's not in use. Why can't that be an option for people that can't afford to pay for driving school?

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- **PAPER DRIVING MANUALS** – Almost half of those interviewed mentioned that they tried and failed to get a paper version of the driving manual for their teen getting a Learner’s Permit. More than half of the parents who participated indicated that they would have liked for their teen to have a paper copy of the driving manual to carry with them as they were learning to drive and for the parents to be able to utilize as a resource when supervising their child. Several parents pointed out that if the child doesn’t have a computer at home and access to the internet, they aren’t able to access the manual or the practice tests in their free time. This has led to delays for some teens in getting their permits, which ultimately means they have less practice time before getting their licenses. There are inherent inequities in the manual only being accessible online.

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I would have loved to have a paper booklet, its something I would have used with my kid and I could have read through it with her and I could have quizzed her along the way and stuff. I really would have liked that.

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I think the thing that disappoints me the most is that they don’t give out paper manuals. They assume that all teenagers can learn online, which also assumes that all teens have the time and access to the internet at home. That isn’t fair because many families can’t afford a computer or the internet.

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- **WEBSITE PRACTICE TESTS WERE HIGHLY UTILIZED** – According to the parents interviewed, for almost all of the teens who were either trying to obtain or had already received their LP, the online practice tests were a highly utilized resource. This was mentioned repeatedly, and there were multiple suggestions from the parents on how to improve the test, including making the study materials more relevant and the actual test more applicable to driving in Alaska.

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My kids thought the practice tests on the website were more helpful than anything in getting their Learner's Permit.

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What about kids who can't access the internet to take the practice tests? Is there a way to get them printed out? Do they have ways kids can take them at school?

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Sometimes the information (on the practice tests) was inconsistent. When they go to take the test, the test will have things that weren't in the manual. Road signs for example, we don't live in a place where we see tractors, like John Deere tractors, but that sign is in the test. The materials need to be congruent with where we live.

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- **MORE RESOURCES FOR PARENTS** – Many of the participants who were supervising or had supervised a teen driver mentioned that the experience had been difficult, conflictual, and stressful. They did not have access through the DMV or any State entity to resources for parents. Several sought out information online and watched YouTube videos, read articles, and printed out materials to carry with them as they were supervising their teen drivers. There were also several discussions about the difficulty of finding space in Anchorage to practice driving, and how this has limited the amount of supervision parents have been able to provide. Providing resources for these parents directly on the DMV website could be a very effective way to encourage effective supervision and make the experience better for both teens and parents.

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I'm finding the supervision process very difficult, there aren't many places in Anchorage where she can practice where there are no other cars. Is there be somewhere we could find information about that?

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There's nothing on the DMV website about how to supervise as a parent. Could they do like an online training course or a video?

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During the supervisory process.... I have lots of mixed emotions. I'm happy they are learning to drive, but there has been a lot of tears, anxiety, and frustration. I don't have experience teaching someone to drive.

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I'd love to have some basic info on good habits for teaching someone to drive, how to remain calm, and how to not make it a negative thing for your relationship. It's been difficult. Could there also be some Alaska specific tips and tricks?

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- **WORD OF MOUTH WAS A PRIMARY SOURCE OF INFORMATION** – The parents who were interviewed said that word of mouth either through their networks or through their teen driver’s was how they received detailed information on the LP and PDL process. This was also how they got information on driving schools, Driver’s Ed programs, and how to interact with the DMV. When they had questions about anything related to licensing, they often turned to other parents rather than the DMV. Many discussed how they later found out the word-of-mouth information was false or incomplete.

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Right now, I would say it is an information free-for-all. I’ve heard 10 different things from 10 different people about the restrictions and penalties. My daughter has her permit but will get her license soon and I should probably figure out where to get the correct information.

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The only reason I know anything about the program is because I heard friends complaining about the restrictions, many of them had wrong information I’ve come to find out.

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I asked other friends who had kids that have gone through the process first. I got lots of advice from them. Some of it turned out to be wrong, but it was still helpful. How come everyone says something different?



- **EFFECTIVE MESSAGING** – When parents were asked about where to best place messaging or information on the LP and PDL programs, many mentioned social media, television, mailers, and the radio. One parent discussed how her daughter had been watching a series of “Learn to Drive” videos on TikTok, and that these videos had been very helpful because they showed real life situations and how to handle them when driving. However, several parents indicated that a better way to get information to parents and teens would be by providing information through the schools. Also mentioned was providing a timeline, process outline, and other information to teens when they visit the DMV for their LP test.

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If they gave information out in the schools or posted things about the permits and licenses and how to get them, my kid would see that and then they could tell me. I think information at the schools would be super helpful in getting the word out and making parents and kids aware.

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I wish there was a brochure or a flyer, just simple like: “how to get your driver’s license in Alaska” from the very beginning. Just walk me through the process. Maybe a graphic on the website where you could click on the different milestones and get more info. Something like that would have been so helpful.

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Could the DMV get information from the PFD or something so that they know we have a child approaching the permit age? That way they could send us information ahead of time and we could be prepared.

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Actually, I read the ads on People Mover buses a lot, but probably most effective would be a social media campaign about safety aimed at Alaskan parents. I would also look for information at the DMV, and maybe through my insurance company.

- **IMPACTFUL MESSAGING** – While parents supported the PDL program restrictions on new drivers, they often mentioned wanting more information and data on why the restrictions were in place and evidence they could site on safety and effectiveness. This was also a factor for those with a LP, parents wanted to hear data on why supervision was important and data that supported the regulations associated with the process. Many mentioned that any future messaging campaign should use data and statistics, be Alaska-focused, and focused on safety.

Data is always helpful; I find it very persuasive. The process seems like it makes sense, but it would be helpful to know why things are changing and what the lessons learned have been.

I trust studies that say this process saves lives. I know in Canada I've seen messaging about why they are taking these steps (provisional licensing) and why it is important for teens to "graduate" to a full license. It made an impact on me and I'd love to see some data and statistics specific to Alaska.

The focus of any messaging should be freedom and independence. Show positive images and what driving will allow a teen to do, but also focus on the community. Show how having a driver's license can allow a teen to get a job, talk about the sense of empowerment that comes with getting a license.

Something that would appeal to me would be to mention that the provisional driver's license process will make my child a safer driver, and that there are long-term benefits to everyone, to society and everyone on the roads. Focus on the safety of the child, but also on how it impacts others on the road. This is a public safety issue, and we need to do our best to keep the public safe.

## CONCLUSION

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The parents that were interviewed were generally aware of the Learner's Permit and Driver's Licensing processes, although there was confusion and misinformation regarding some of the requirements, restrictions, and penalties. Most were able to access the Alaska DMV as a starting place, but many found the website lacking in resources, especially those relevant to parents, caregivers, and those in charge of supervising their teen driver during the LP process. Parents asked for more resources aimed at them including information on how to be a better driving teacher, how to effectively supervise, and how to make the process smoother and less anxiety-producing. Ideas were discussed such as brochures, roadmap graphics, videos, and online training modules for parents.

Those interviewed were largely in favor of the provisional licensing process, citing the safety and long-term implication for the teen driver as well as everyone on the roads. Messaging around public safety in any future campaigns will strike a powerful emotional note, especially given the permanent consequences.

Issues around equity emerged in several places during the parent interviews. These issues of access, affordability, and availability arose when discussing the manual and practice tests for the Learner's Permit being online only, and the difficulty of obtaining a paper copy of the manual. There were also obvious inequities when it came to driver's ed and driver training options. Many parents who could afford it placed their teen drivers in schools and programs costing between \$500-\$1600. These driving programs were out of reach for many families, who in addition to not having the funds to pay for driving school, also mentioned not having the time to do the supervision themselves due to full time work and other responsibilities. This has serious and important implications for public safety due to one group of drivers having access to high-quality driver training, while another group not only doesn't have the option to enroll in these programs, they also don't have an adult with time to supervise them. This effects not only the teen drivers, but everyone on the road. Many parents themselves suggested the remedy to this was to have driver training in schools, or to subsidize the training for those unable to access it.

In terms of awareness and messaging about the process and reasoning behind the current DMV programs, placement of a messaging campaign targeting parents is critical. From parent input, a social media campaign may be the most effective way to address a larger group as an awareness raising method. But there should be a call to action included, such as a website to go to for more information, a graphic with a roadmap, or links to specific resources for parents. Ads on the radio, around town, in school, and at the DMV were also mentioned as effective awareness strategies.

The messaging within these campaigns could be most effective, according to the input gathered during these interviews, if it focused on safety. The focus on safety should include data, statistics, and evidence of the program's effectiveness either here or in other locations, and an appeal for parents to engage more in the licensing process in order to make their teen a better driver. There could be many ways to do this, including to access some of the resources that could potentially be added on the website. There was also an appeal to focus on teen and parent empowerment through the process of getting and using a driver's license.

It would also be helpful to conduct similar groups in other geographical locations and with a broader variety of racial and socio-economic groups.

Overall, the parents were very engaged in the process and provided a wealth of valuable information.