WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF LICENSING

Expanded Driver Education Requirements Implementation Report

ESHB 1878 Improving Young Driver Safety

Washington State Department of Licensing

Legislative and Policy Office

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Contact Information

Washington State Department of Licensing

Legislative and Policy Office

Molly Voris

Molly.Voris@dol.wa.gov

Related Information

Appendix: Summary of Key Data Trends for the 2026 Annual Implementation Plan

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ESHB 1878 Improving Young Driver Safety

Executive summary

Engrossed Substitute House Bill (ESHB) 1878 focuses on improving young driver safety. The bill aims to reduce serious injury and fatal crashes by extending and expanding driver training age requirements and expanding access to driver education. This landmark legislation is the most extensive driver education bill in the country. Consequently, the implementation of ESHB 1878 represents a restructuring of the state's traffic safety education infrastructure. The magnitude of this transition requires a coordinated, industry-wide scaling of training provider and instructor capacity and resources to meet the unprecedented demand for driver education and the state's readiness to meet that demand.

Section 2. of SHB 1878 requires the Department of Licensing (DOL) to:

- Implements mandatory driver training education for persons 18 years old beginning January 1, 2027, with an ongoing incremental mandate for the next oldest cohorts every January 1st through the age of 21, authorizing DOL to delay implementation if there is insufficient driver training school and instructor capacity.
- Adds pre-license education requirements for persons under age 25 to take a work zone and first responder safety course until this education is added to the required curriculum for driver training education.
- Adds post-license education requirements for persons under 23 upon the renewal of their initial driver's license.
- Adds the requirement to complete additional driver training education for persons under age 25 who have committed a traffic infraction for a moving violation for two occasions and requires DOL to suspend these individuals if they fail to comply with the educational requirements within 180 days of notice.

This report summarizes the work being done to implement the expanded age requirement between 2027 and 2030 and the capacity of Washington's driver education system to respond to an increase in demand. This document fulfills the requirement under RCW

46.20.1191(7) to report on implementation efforts related to the expanded age requirement, and the driver education system's readiness.

The Department of Licensing (DOL) is working closely with Washington traffic safety professionals, learning from other states' experiences with expanded age requirements, and will be conducting outreach to young novice drivers, their parents/guardians, and young adults to inform the implementation of ESHB 1878.

The Improving Young Driver Safety (Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill [ESSB] 5583) Implementation Plan informed key elements of ESHB 1878 and highlighted the need to consider industry and system readiness. Appendix 1 provides a summary with updated data provided in ESSB 5583.

Implementation efforts

To meet the unprecedented demand created by expanding driver education requirements, the Department of Licensing (DOL) is leading a coordinated, industry-wide effort to first understand and then address the scaling of training capacity and resources required from this legislation. This high-magnitude transition requires collaboration with licensed private driver training schools, public school programs, driver education instructors, impacted people and their advocates, and partner agencies to ensure the state is prepared to serve a significantly larger population of novice drivers. In addition, several system changes are needed within DOL's Driver and Vehicle Licensing System (DRIVES) and the Professional and Business Licensing System (PBLS).

To manage this transition, the department has established a multi-layered outreach strategy to align industry capacity with new legislative mandates. This approach focuses on several critical areas.

- Outreach and Collaboration
    - Washington Driver Education Advisory Committee (WDEAC)
    - Industry outreach and town halls
    - National benchmarking
    - Young adults, including those from marginalized communities
    - Impacted people and advocacy organizations
    - Partner agencies including the Washington Traffic Safety Commission (WTSC), the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), and the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS)

- Regulatory Transformation
    - Fundamental revision of rules for Driver Training Schools in WAC 308-108
    - Targeted amendments to WAC 308-104 and WAC 308-110 for statutory harmony

Washington Driver Education Advisory Committee (WDEAC) and town halls

An advisory group was established through a competitive application process to support progress under aggressive timelines. Initial work began in June to identify the structure and purpose of the group, as well as establish a recruitment and selection process. Members were selected to reflect a broad range of interests, backgrounds, and experience, including driver training school owners and instructors, curriculum developers, OSPI staff, and representatives from both the private and public driver training school associations. The group serves only in an advisory capacity, without making formal recommendations or decisions. To ensure structured and productive engagement, twice-monthly meetings began in September, supported by an agency internal planning committee that meets weekly to develop the framework and set meeting agendas.

WDEAC members regularly connect with other school owners and instructors to ensure they are bringing the voice of their colleagues and peers to the discussions. The department has led WDEAC in conversations related to:

- Instructor training and licensing
- Self-paced online classroom instruction
- 4-hour behind the wheel hardship
- Driver Education Voucher Program (DEVP)
- Rule writing needs
- Accessibility

WDEAC has provided insight into the holistic implications of the bill and how many provisions intersect with related dependencies, as well as indicating a change in the ability of driver training schools to meet increased demand. More specifically, the group has advised that allowing self-paced online classroom instruction reduces the number of instructors needed for the 30-hour portion of driver education. School owners involved in WDEAC reported concerns related to recruiting, hiring, and training enough instructors for the expanded age requirement. This is very different than what was shared in the Improving

Young Driver Safety ESSB 5583 Implementation report. Follow-up with the broader industry to determine the ability of schools to meet demand will be included in an upcoming survey that is noted below in the department's 2026 plans.

While WDEAC is an integral component of implementation, the department also recognizes the need to connect with all instructors, schools, and the people who will be impacted by these new requirements. An initial town hall was held in November 2025 to provide updates on the work being done. Beginning in January, DOL will begin hosting regularly scheduled monthly town halls to share information, answer questions, and receive feedback. We will begin outreach efforts to young adults and those advocacy organizations that support young adults in Washington state. DOL will use this feedback to ensure access and equity concerns are raised and addressed.

Outreach to Young Drivers

There is tremendous impact on young drivers and their families with the expanded age requirement. DOL is developing a comprehensive communications and outreach strategy for informing the public of these changes and will include approaches for connecting with young novice drivers and their parents/guardians, and young adults impacted by the over 18 requirements.

Outreach to other states

DOL staff have met with traffic safety professionals from other states to learn from their experiences in implementing expanded age requirements and self-paced online programs. These meetings support the department in thoughtfully and strategically implementing the expanded driver training requirements based on learnings from other states.

Other bill provision impacts

Self-paced online education

The Improving Young Driver Safety ESSB 5583 implementation report highlighted a concern related to industry readiness and capacity to respond to the extended age requirement based on the number of licensed instructors in the state. The impact of self-paced online education is a factor to examine when looking at the number of licensed instructors.

Developing appropriate regulatory guidelines and writing rules for driver training schools to offer self-paced online classroom content will require evaluation of models in other states and collaboration with owners, instructors, students and national providers such as American Automobile Association (AAA).

Self-paced online instruction raises questions and concerns related to:

- Consideration of the age differences related to time limits must be considered. Someone who is 15 versus someone who is 21 may not be able to effectively learn by sitting in front of a computer for several hours.

A 30-day course limit may not be appropriate for drivers aged 18 to 22 because it could serve as a barrier to employment. Drivers aged 18 to 22 will not be subject to intermediate license requirements Drivers aged 18 to 22 will not be subject to a required one hour of instruction for parents/guardians.

Washington-specific model

DOL identified the need to develop a Washington-specific model for offering self-paced online classroom instruction. This is due in large part to the unique nature of Washington's driver education system which includes both OSPI and private driver training school programs, coupled with a requirement for comprehensive course exams prior to administering Washington state knowledge and skills exams.

Other states

Review of states offering self-paced online instruction has revealed substantial differences in approval, regulation, and compliance. While some states have limited rules and guidelines governing this delivery method, others provide robust guidelines coupled with extensive technical and system requirements that are regularly audited to ensure compliance. Table 1 summarizes information on experienced programs in Idaho, Ohio, Nevada, California, and Colorado. DOL staff are also working on a research memo to further inform development of self-paced online learning rules, policies, and procedures.

4-hour behind the wheel hardship

Existing course requirements limit behind the wheel instruction to one hour in a single day. Section 2 of the bill authorized schools to offer up to 4 hours of behind-the-wheel instruction in a single day in situations of hardship. WDEAC meetings have illuminated the concern schools and instructors have that without departmental guidelines to ensure the quality and integrity of behind-the-wheel lessons are jeopardized by having someone drive for 4 straight hours. Without more narrowly defining hardship beyond distance, it is subjective based and open to individual interpretation. Learning to drive is a complex and exhausting mental process with national organizations recommending behind-the-wheel lessons be limited to 90 minutes at a time, especially for younger novice drivers. Expanding the age requirement beyond 18 and allowing 4 hours behind-the-wheel in one day has drawn concern

Driver education system readiness

ESHB 1878 requires DOL to assess the current readiness of the driver education school system to accommodate additional growth before and during implementation. As Appendix 1 notes, the expanded driver training requirement mandated by ESHB 1878 will result in a substantial increase in the population that is required to complete driver training prior to licensure. From 2027 to 2030, there will be an estimated 53% increase in the number of new drivers that are subject to the requirement (based on first driver license issuance counts for 2021-2025). To better understand how driver training schools perceive their readiness, DOL plans to conduct a survey of driver training school (DTS) instructors and owners, as well as OSPI instructors and administrators. Findings from this survey will inform policy implementation and identify areas where additional support may be needed.

From 2021 through 2025, there was an average range of about 67 to 93 driver training students per instructor annually in Washington state (Figure 7). It will be important to continue monitoring these trends as the age requirement is expanded over the implementation period.

Instructor workforce capacity and instructor training

In response to concerns related to instructor workforce, the bill included a provision for the department to expand training opportunities for new instructors. The *Instructor Training Series Pilot* program was created in 2024 by the Department of Licensing (DOL) as part of ESSB 5583, *Improving Young Driver Safety*. Below is a summary of the program and includes recommendations for future development.

Instructor training pilot overview

The *Instructor Training Series Pilot* ran for 10 weeks from April 2025 to June 2025. The goal of the pilot program was to provide accessible, online training that fulfills the 100-hour requirement and leads to instructor licensure while enhancing training consistency, rigor, and professional standards within the field. It consisted of 10 instructor-led virtual classes and weekly assignments that included readings, projects, and behind-the-wheel instruction practice, and 20 hours of in-person behind-the-wheel training with a DOL trainer.

Participants

The program started with 18 participants enrolled.

- 1 participant signed initial forms, then dropped before the pilot started.

- 1 participant self-withdrew because they wanted to have the option to only become a behind-the-wheel instructor.
- 4 participants were removed from the pilot course due to lack of performance.
- 12 participants completed the program in its entirety and passed the course.
- 4 participants became certified OSPI traffic safety instructors.
    - 1 OSPI participant is employed at a tribal school.
    - 3 OSPI participants are employed in rural school districts.
- 7 participants speak a language other than English.
    - 1 participant has completed both the knowledge and driving exam.
    - 2 participants have passed the knowledge exam.

Sixty-six percent of participants completed and passed the course. Of those that completed and passed the course, 33% have passed the necessary exams or received proper waivers from OSPI to become licensed driver education instructors. The pilot program needs to be reviewed and refined. For future pilots, it is recommended that the DOL offer the program relying mostly on self-paced classroom content and partner with trainer of trainers for the behind-the-wheel portion.

LMS System

As part of 1878, the department has contracted with an LMS vendor who provides driver education content to deliver the Work Zone First Responder Course requirement. Initial procurement activities were delayed due to the need to reevaluate assumed content providers who were not able to meet DOL's accessibility standards. This means the launch of the Work Zone First Responder Course will be delayed by several months. In addition, DOL intends to utilize the LMS to support the development and launch of self-paced online classroom content for instructors.

2026 plans

The department's continued efforts using an integrated approach to implementing the expanded age requirement and ensuring industry readiness while considering impacts of other bill provisions is crucial moving forward. Implementation efforts that will be undertaken in 2026 include:

- Continue regular WDEAC and other interested party meetings and hosting town halls
- Meetings with individual driver training school owners and instructors and students
- Upcoming readiness survey of driver training school owners and instructors
- Establish self-paced online rules and guidelines
- Build frameworks for electronic translation devices and 4 hours behind-the-wheel hardship
- Further development of instructor training series
- Self-paced online research to inform program development

Because the bill fundamentally alters core industry pillars—including allowing for the inclusion of self-paced online components of the curriculum, mandatory course content for work zone safety, modernized instructor certification standards, and a new financial assistance voucher program—a complete overhaul of existing rules is necessary to ensure clear, consistent guidance for both the department and schools. These revisions will allow the department to effectively manage its expanded oversight and reporting responsibilities while aligning administrative rules with the new OSPI partnership mandates and phased-in age requirements.

Appendix

This data summary highlights key trends to set the context for the expanded driver training requirement, which is scheduled to begin January 1, 2027. The key data trends described below include first license issuances, students completing driver training courses in Washington State, active driver training instructors in Washington State, and driver training student-to-instructor ratios by year. The emphasis is on the five most recent years of data (2021 through 2025) and 16-21-year-olds to reflect the age group subject to the expanded driver training requirement in ESHB 1878.

Many of these data trends were initially analyzed by Washington State University (WSU) in 2024 as part of the Improving Young Driver Safety Feasibility Study, conducted as part of ESSB 5583 and included in the ESSB 5583 Implementation Plan. The key findings from the feasibility study (based on WSU's literature reviews, interviews with key stakeholders, and data and GIS analysis), included the following:

- There are approximately 316 private and 27 public driver training schools operating in Washington as of 2024, and approximately 750 instructors actively teaching courses as of 2023.
- If driver education requirements are expanded to those aged 18-24, the total number of individuals requiring driver training education is projected to increase by more than 60 percent annually if licensing trends persist over time.
- The existing infrastructure of private driver training schools is insufficient for addressing the expansion of driver training education to 18- to 24-year-olds. Interviews indicated a shortage of instructors within Washington and nationally, which hinders timely delivery of the behind-the-wheel component of driver training education, resulting in a significant bottleneck for training delivery.
- Expansion of driver education requirements will place economic and accessibility burdens on already vulnerable populations in the state whose access to driving is essential for their personal and economic activities.
- Public schools are not a viable alternative for driver education programming without changes to training requirements, creation of Washington State-based training, and significant funding for establishing programming.

NOTE – DOL's Driver & Vehicle System (DRIVES) is the data source for driver license issuances, driver training student counts, and counts of active driver training instructors. Counts of active Driver Training School licenses by year (Table 2) were obtained from DOL's Polaris System.

First Issuance Driver Licenses

Between 2021 and 2025, there was an average of about 145,000 first time driver licenses issued annually in Washington State. This count excludes people transferring driver licenses from other states or jurisdictions. Among these first license issuances:

- About 40% were new drivers aged 16-17;
- About 21% were new drivers aged 18-21; and,
- About 40% were new drivers aged 22 and older.

Between 2021 and 2025, there were about 57,000 new license issuances to 16 and 17 year olds, who are currently subject to the driver training requirement. For the same period, there were about 30,000 new license issuances to drivers ages 18 through 21; this age group will be subject to the expanded driver training requirement when it's fully implemented. This represents an estimated 53% increase in the number of new drivers that are subject to the driver training requirement, once the requirement is fully implemented.

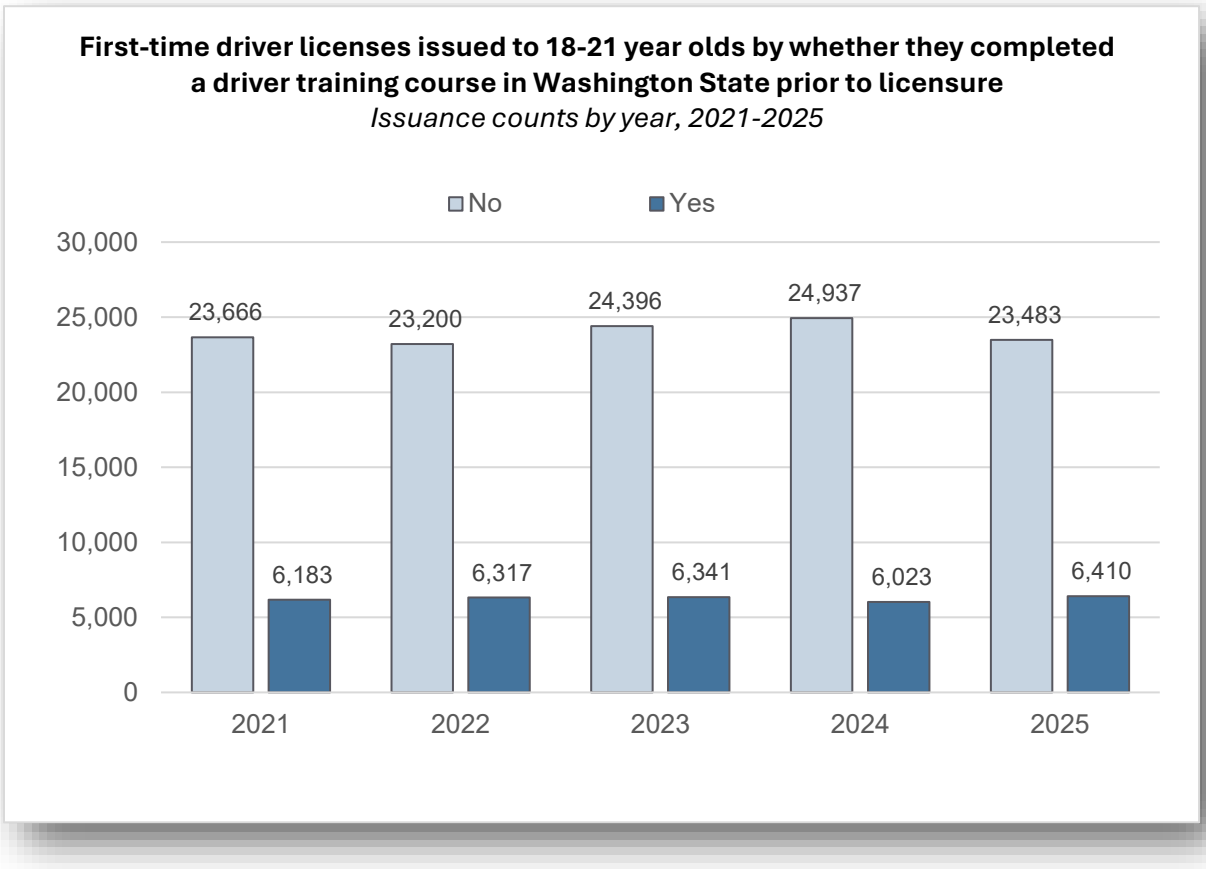
Table 1. Total Number of First Issuance Driver Licenses by Year and Age at Issuance, 2021-2025.

Total Number of First Issuance Driver Licenses by Year & Age at Issuance						2021-2025 Annual Average
Age	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**	**2025**	
16	44,298	43,402	46,723	46,413	46,467	45,461
	33.33%	31.16%	30.56%	29.76%	32.51%	31.40%
17	12,425	11,786	12,002	11,444	11,375	11,806
	9.35%	8.46%	7.85%	7.34%	7.96%	8.15%
18	13,104	13,430	13,711	13,819	14,016	13,616
	9.86%	9.64%	8.97%	8.86%	9.81%	9.40%
19	7,521	6,937	7,346	7,259	6,866	7,186
	5.66%	4.98%	4.81%	4.65%	4.80%	4.96%
20	5,200	5,060	5,309	5,353	4,935	5,171
	3.91%	3.63%	3.47%	3.43%	3.45%	3.57%
21	4,024	4,090	4,371	4,529	4,076	4,218
	3.03%	2.94%	2.86%	2.90%	2.85%	2.91%
22-24	9,136	9,805	11,091	11,475	9,991	10,300
	6.87%	7.04%	7.26%	7.36%	6.99%	7.11%
25+	37,181	44,759	52,314	55,667	45,184	47,021
	27.98%	32.14%	34.22%	35.69%	31.62%	32.48%
Total	**132,889**	**139,269**	**152,867**	**155,959**	**142,910**	**144,779**

Notes: First issuance counts exclude out-of-state transfers. The above counts include licensees who may have completed driver training in another state or jurisdiction but didn't obtain a license prior to their initial license in Washington State. However, this population is difficult to identify and is relatively small in size.

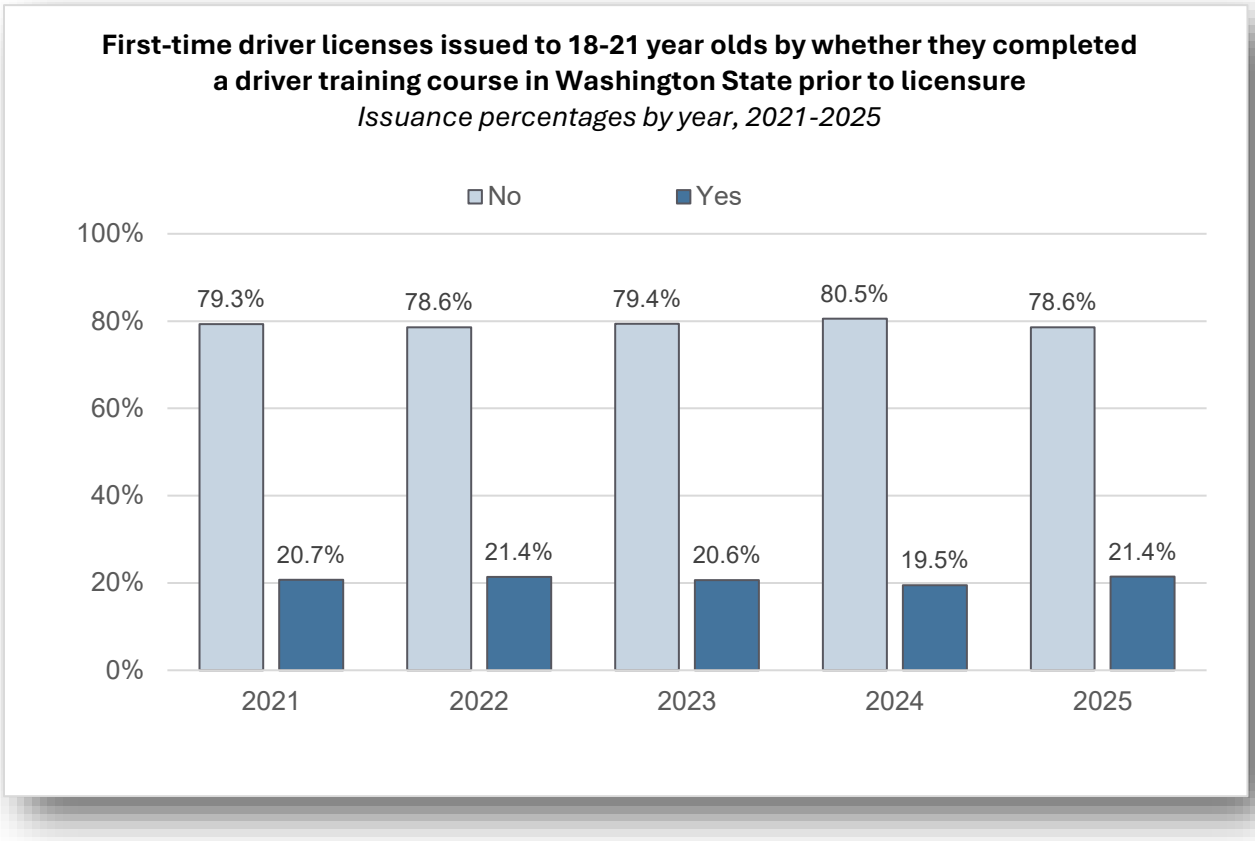
Most of the new licensees ages 18 through 21 in Washington State obtain their first driver license without first completing a driver training course. For the five-year period of 2021-2025, there were about 151,000 first time driver licensees ages 18 through 21 in Washington State. Among these new licensees, about 120,000 (79%) obtained their license without completing a driver training course prior to licensure, while 31,000 (21%) completed a driver training course prior to getting their initial license. Annual trends for the share of young adults ages 18-21 that complete training prior to licensure have held relatively consistent since 2021.

Figure 1. Count of first-time driver licenses issued to 18–21-year-olds by driver training course completion status prior to licensure, 2021-2025.



Notes: First issuance counts exclude out-of-state transfers.

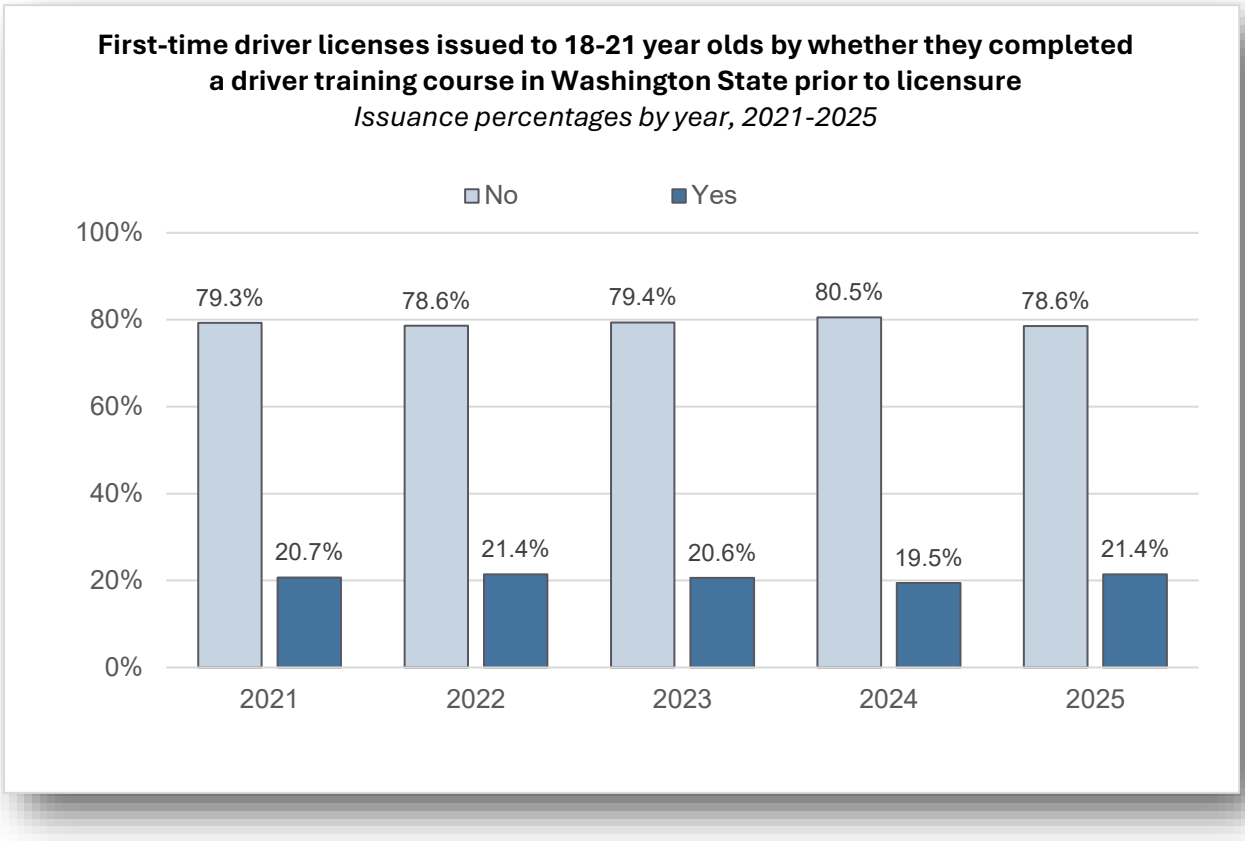
Figure 2. Percent of first-time driver licenses issued to 18–21-year-olds by driver training course completion status prior to licensure, 2021-2025.



Note: First issuance counts exclude out-of-state transfers.

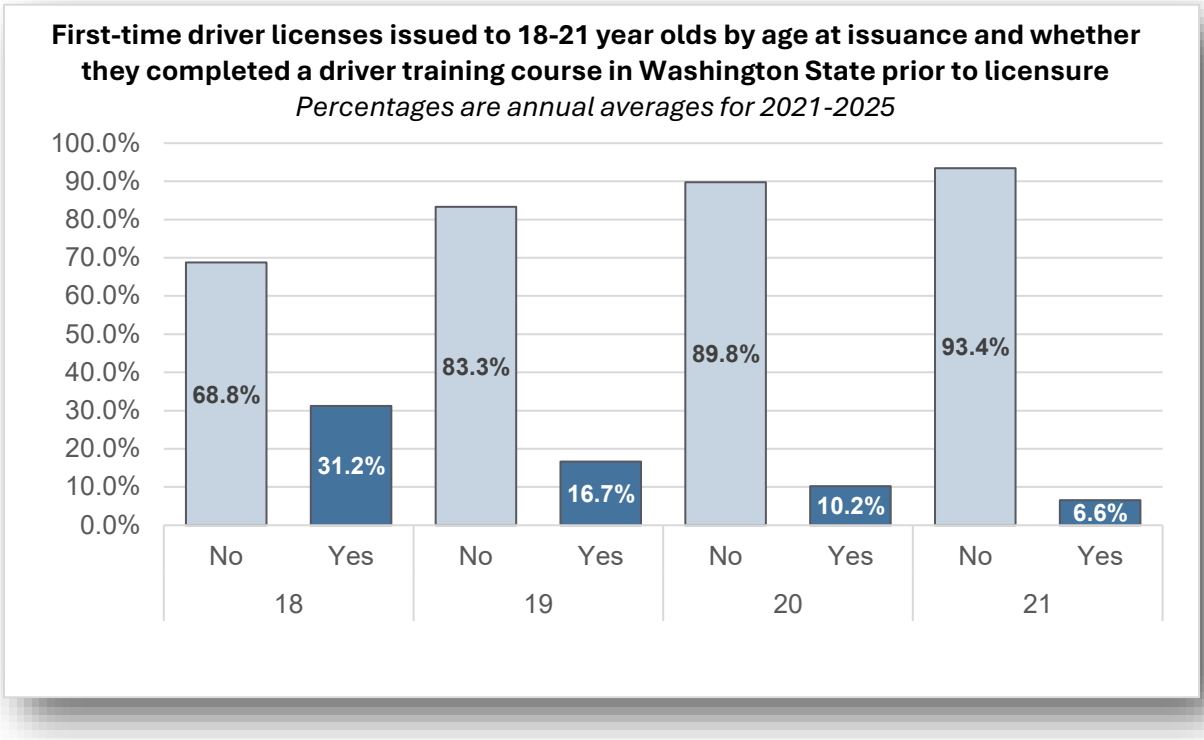
Among first time licensees aged 18-21 years old, a higher proportion of 18-year-olds completed training prior to licensure. Between 2021 and 2025, an annual average of nearly 4,300 (31%) of new drivers aged 18 completed driver training prior to licensure. This percentage consistently declines with age and is less than 7% for 21-year-old new licensees between 2021 and 2025.

Figure 3. Count of first-time driver licenses issued to 18–21-year-olds by age at issuance and driver training course completion status prior to licensure, 2021-2025.



Notes: First issuance counts exclude out-of-state transfers.

Figure 4. Percent of first-time driver licenses issued to 18–21-year-olds by age at issuance and driver training course completion status prior to licensure, 2021-2025.



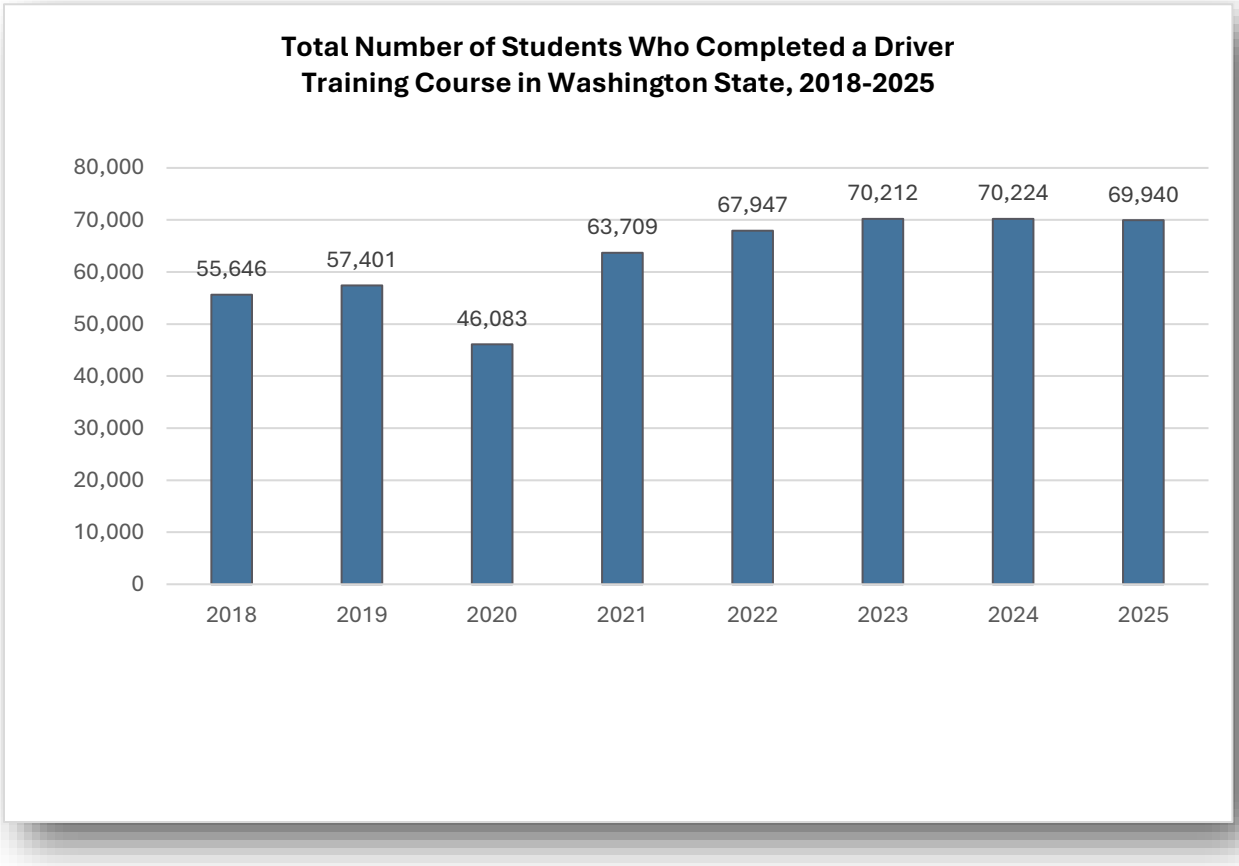
Notes: First issuance counts exclude out-of-state transfers.

Driver Training School Students

In 2025, nearly 70,000 students completed a driver training course in Washington State. This includes public and private driver training school locations. In addition, these annual counts include students who passed and failed courses, as well as duplicate counts of students that took a driver training course multiple times.

There was a significant drop in driver training course completions during 2020 due to the impacts of Covid-19. However, annual course completions have been relatively stable since 2022.

Figure 5. Total Number of Students who Completed a Driver Training Course in Washington State, 2018-2025.

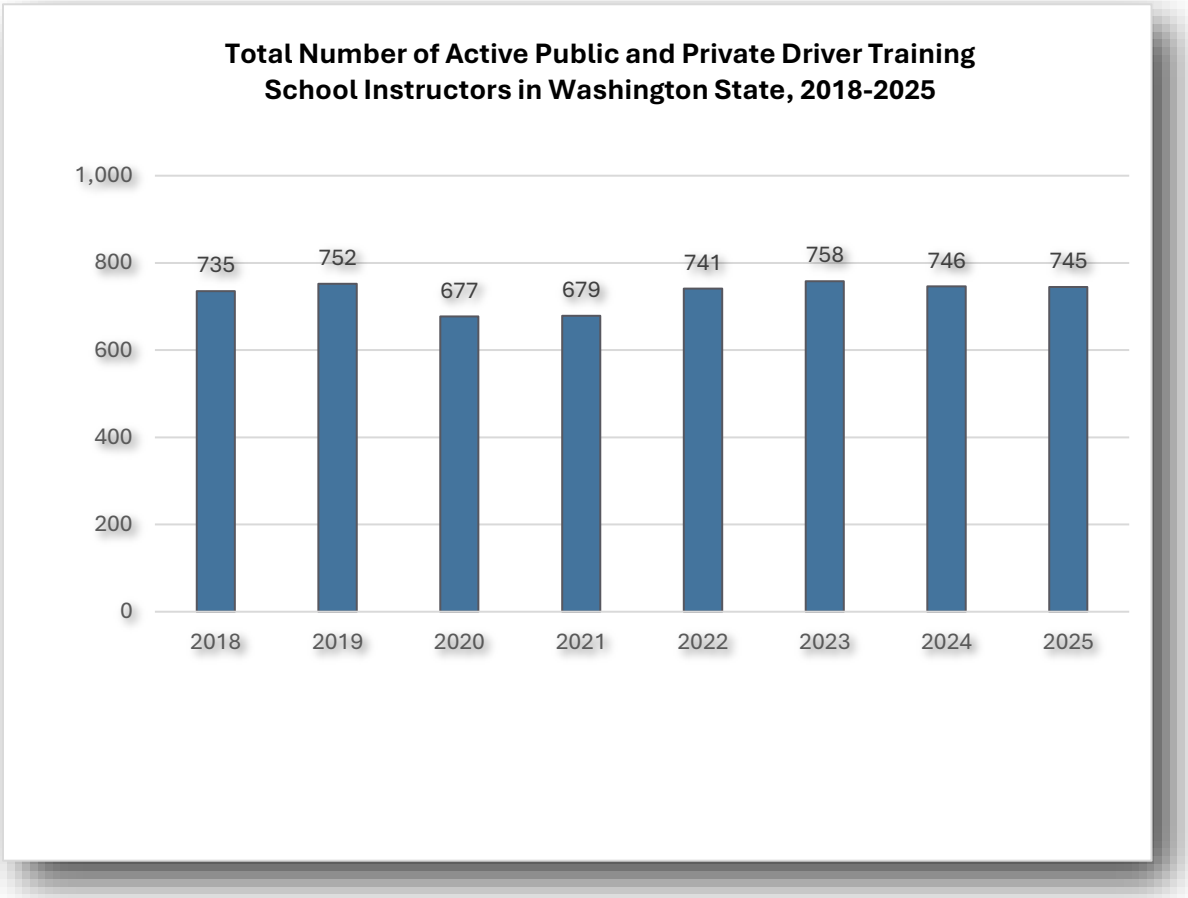


Notes: The counts in the above chart include students that passed and failed courses, as well as duplicates (students that took a course more than once). The counts include courses at public and private driver training school locations.

Driver Training School Instructors

Between 2021 and 2025, there was an average of 734 driver training school instructors annually teaching courses in Washington State. This count includes instructors who teach at least one driver training course in a given year at a public or private driver training school location in Washington State as reported to the DOL. This may result in an underestimate if multiple instructors are involved in teaching a course and/or providing behind-the-wheel instruction and the school is only able to report the primary course instructor to DOL. Similar to the trend of driver training school students completing courses by year, the number of active driver training school instructors hit a low in 2020 and then has been relatively stable between 2022 and 2025.

Figure 6. Total Number of Active Public and Private Driver Training School Instructors in Washington State, 2018-2025.



Notes: Driver training school instructors are defined as "active" in the chart above if they taught at least one course at a driver training school location in Washington State in a given year. The counts include instructors at public and private driver training school locations.

Driver Training School Active Licenses

The table below provides annual point-in-time counts of active DOL professional licenses for driver training schools, driver training school branch locations, and instructors. These counts are as of the end of the calendar year and include public (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)) and private driver training school locations and instructors. This table is intended to provide an illustration of the licensee population to further inform industry capacity. Since an instructor can hold an active license but not teach any courses in a given year (for example, if they work for a driver training school and only conduct driving exams), this can result in a difference between the instructor licensee counts shown in the table below vs. the active instructor counts shown previously in Figure 6.

Table 2. Annual Point-in-Time Counts of Active Licenses for Driver Training Schools, Branches, and Instructors, 2021-2025.

Active License Counts by Year	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Driver Training Schools	182	183	177	185	203
Driver Training School Branches	144	141	122	119	124
Driver Training School Instructors	924	991	1,012	1,060	1,114

Notes: Data Source: Polaris. Counts are active licenses as of the end of the calendar year. These counts include public/OSPI and private driver training schools, branches, and instructors.

Driver Training School Student-to-Instructor Ratio Estimates

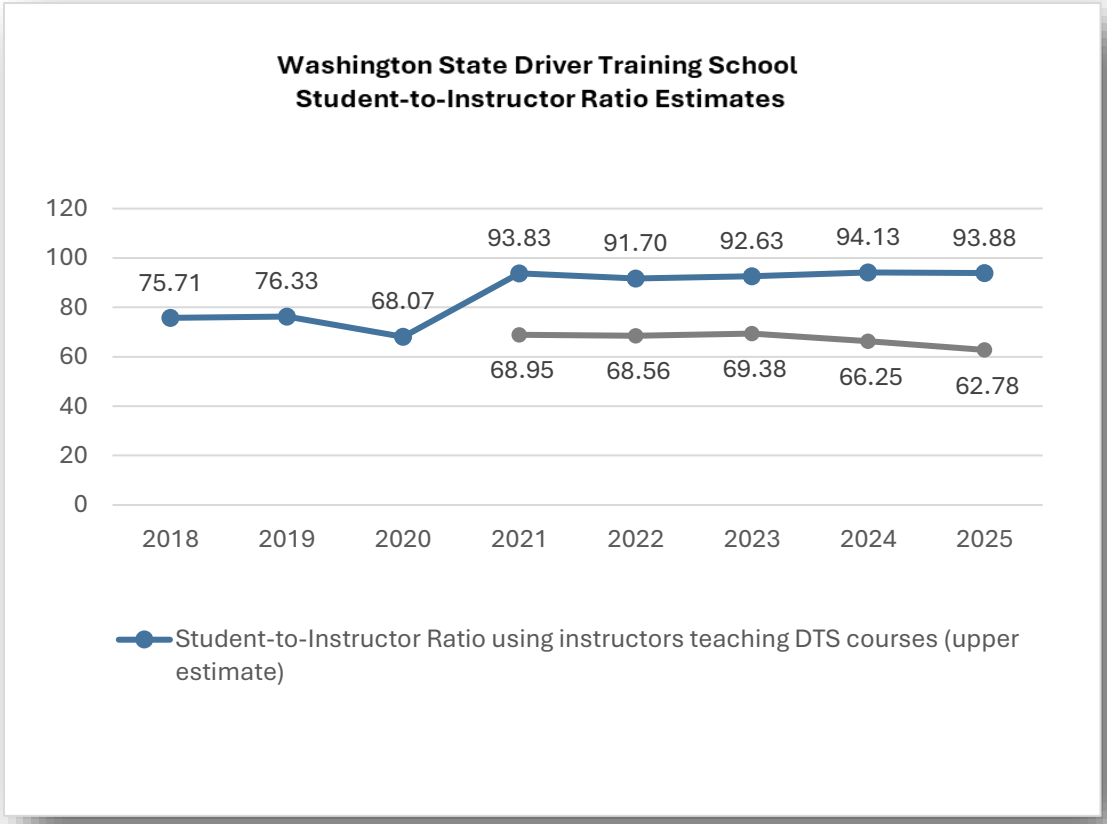
The chart below shows the statewide driver training student-to-instructor ratio in Washington State between 2018 and 2025 for driver training instructors teaching courses (blue) and between 2021 and 2025 for driver training instructors holding active professional licenses (gray). We include instructor estimates from two data sources, DRIVES (blue) and Polaris (gray) to provide an estimated range for the student-to-instructor ratio:

- The blue line represents instructors who taught at least one course at a driver training school location in Washington State in a given year as reported in DRIVES. This can result in an underestimate of instructors if schools report only one primary instructor for a course when there are multiple instructors involved in teaching the course and/or providing behind-the-wheel instruction.
- The gray line represents instructors who hold an active driver training instructor professional license with DOL, based on active licensee counts in Polaris. This may result in an overestimate of instructors if an instructor held an active license but did not teach any courses in a given year, which would underestimate the student-to-instructor ratio. (Note that the Polaris system was implemented in 2020 and the full first year of data available is 2021.)

Based on these data, there was an average range of about 67 to 93 driver training students per instructor annually in Washington state from 2021 to 2025.

While Figure 7 focuses at the statewide level using historical data for total students completing driver training education, student-to-instructor ratios can vary quite substantially across different geographic regions in the state (see Figure 4, p. 74, in the Improving Young Driver Safety Feasibility Study). Future analysis should address student-to-instructor ratios at the local/community level and consider additional factors affecting access to driver training such as income level, language, and drive time to nearest driver training school location.

Figure 7. Driver Training School Student-to-Instructor Ratio Estimates in Washington State, 2018-2025.



Notes: The chart above includes students and instructors at public and private driver training school locations. The number of students is the same across both ratio estimates. We include instructor estimates from two data sources, DRIVES (blue) and Polaris (gray) to provide an estimated range for the student-to-instructor ratio: (1) The **blue** line represents instructors who taught at least one course at a driver training school location in Washington State in a given year as reported in DRIVES. This can result in an underestimate of instructors if schools report only one primary instructor for a course when there are multiple instructors involved in teaching the course or providing behind-the-wheel instruction. (2) The **gray** line represents instructors who hold an active driver training instructor professional license with DOL. This may result in an overestimate of instructors if an instructor held an active license but did not teach any courses in a given year.