

## NAHS students learn joys, headaches of parenthood

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### — So you know

New Albany and Floyd Central high schools received 15 RealCare babies each through a \$20,000 grant from the Horseshoe Foundation of Floyd County.

Students in Sharon Allen's child development class at New Albany High School have a textbook, take notes and learn from in-house projects and lectures.

But the real life lesson occurs when they take an infant home for the weekend.

It's not a real baby, but it's close.

Just ask senior Breanna Bielfeld. She had to take her RealCare baby to work on a Friday night — at Great Escape Theaters. While she tore tickets and helped patrons, she also had to hold her baby who kept crying. "It was kind of embarrassing," she said. "People would look at me like 'I can't believe she already has a baby.' It was tough."

It's meant to be tough. It's a pro-active approach to show teenagers how difficult it can be to care for a baby and how there are consequences to the choices they make.

During weekend nights, students are awakened several times by a crying baby who needs to be fed, have its diaper changed or just held.

"On Saturday night it was crying so much so I started crying," said junior Felecia Crawford. "It stressed me out so much it was scary."

Which is what it is meant to do, according to Allen. Thanks to a \$20,000 grant from the Horseshoe Foundation of Floyd County, New Albany and Floyd Central high schools received 15 RealCare Babies each. The babies, from Realityworks Inc., not only look real but also act like it. They are computerized and require real care. They have different cries which require different types of actions.

Students are fitted with wristbands which monitor the baby and the care they receive from Friday afternoon to Monday morning. There is no throwing the baby in the corner of the bedroom or making a parent care for it. The wristband — which cannot be taken off — makes that impossible.

Students are graded on their parenting skills. But more importantly, they learn how tough it is to be a teenage parent.

"I thought it was a really good experience," said sophomore Jordan Skaggs. "A lot of schools should invest in these. I had plans Friday night but it cried all night. I would never want to be a single mother. It was really hard."

Allen hopes that is the lesson the students really learn. Caring for babies is challenging for adults, but even tougher for teenagers who are trying to go to school and hold a job.

"This is a real-life situation that you can't get in a class," Allen said. "It's definitely an eye-opener. They come back and say there is no way they could possibly do this and go to school. They are exhausted after one weekend."

Allen said the baby cries several times Friday and Saturday nights, but not as much Sunday since Monday is a school day. Each time the baby cries, the student has to take care of its need.

And it's not just the female students who have to take the baby simulators home. The boys also get a taste of parenting.

Jaime Jaime said he didn't expect to have any problems with the baby. But he said it was challenging.

"It kept me up most of the night," he said. "It made me think about the kind of parent I want to be in the

future.”

Senior Meghan Hopper took her baby to church and had to leave half way through the service because it was crying.

“I had to take it to the bathroom because it started crying,” she said. “I think people who don’t think it can happen to them or want to get pregnant should take this class.”

Allen said she has received positive feedback from parents.

“They love it,” she said.

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#### Photos



New Albany High School seniors Lindsey Allen, left, and Cayla Thomas laugh at each other as they read a book to their RealCare babies on Wednesday during advanced child development class. Staff photo by Kevin McGloshen



The RealCare babies were purchased with a \$20,000 grant from the Horseshoe Foundation of Floyd County. Staff photo by Kevin McGloshen



New Albany senior Rebecca Wallace reaches for a bottle to feed her RealCare Baby during advanced child development class on Wednesday. Staff photo by Kevin McGloshen



New Albany High School was able to purchase 15 RealCare babies with the help of a grant from the Horseshoe Foundation of Floyd County. Staff photo by Kevin McGloshen