

# High tech parenting at Acton High School

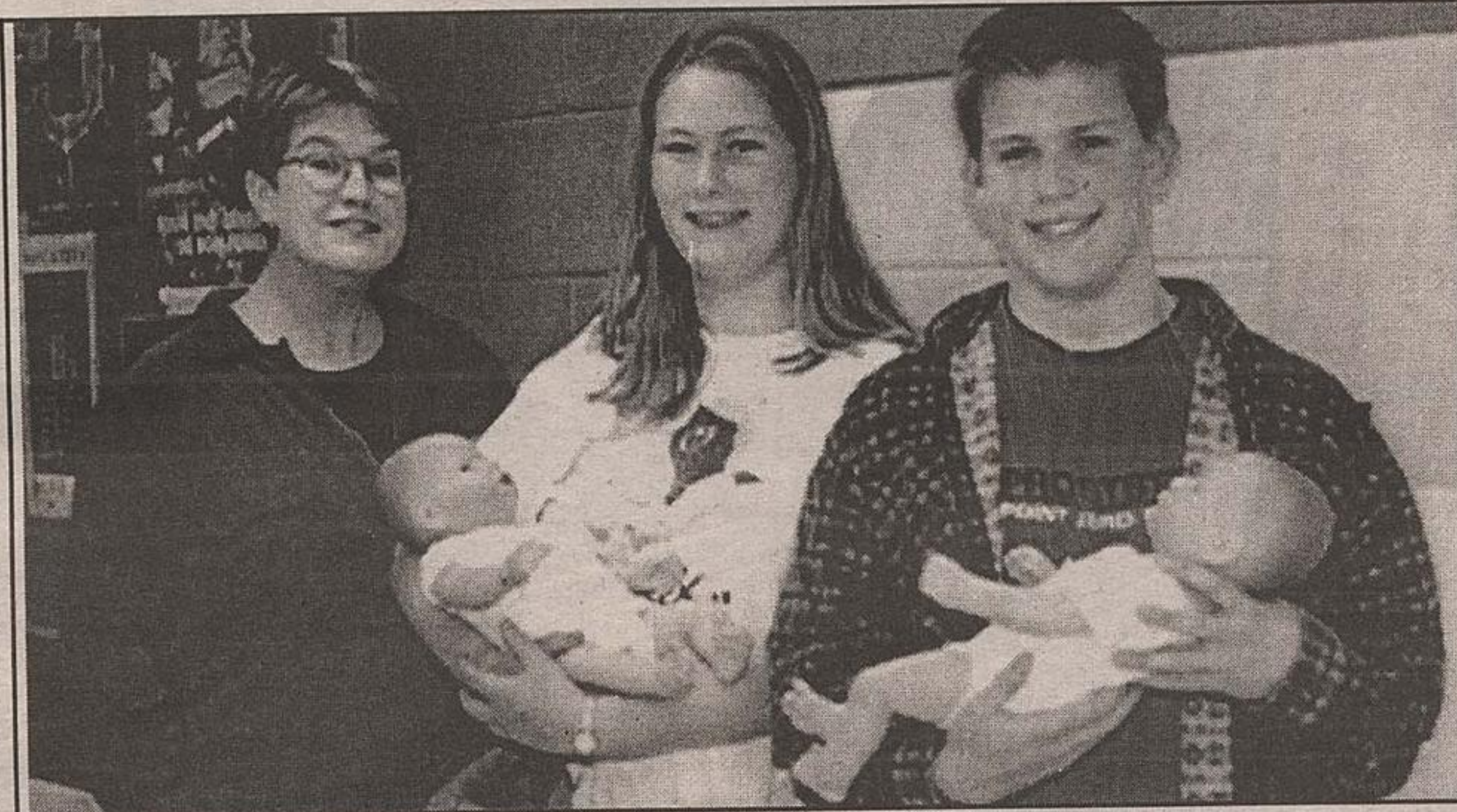
By FRANCES NIBLOCK  
The New Tanner

The demanding, sometimes unrelenting cries of two newborn "babies" are echoing through the classrooms and halls at Acton High as two classes of students learn what it's really like to be parents.

The 8-pound "babies" are expensive infant simulators. They look, feel and smell like real babies. They are programmed to sound like them, too. On-board computers make the babies cry randomly and the only thing that will quiet them is to be picked up and have a key inserted in their back. The key is held until the crying stops, which could be immediately or in a half-an-hour.

Although the students have been playing parents for the past two weeks, carrying around dolls and sacks of flour, when the simulator dolls, called Baby Think It Over, were unwrapped their "realness" caused concern.

"Do I have to hold it?" asked Grade 11 student James Mashinter as teacher Nancy Mistruzzi placed one of the "babies" in his arms on Friday. The answer was yes. Each student will be assigned a doll for at least 48 hours so they can learn three things: the time and energy it takes to look after a baby, the profound changes a baby makes in a parent's life and



**DON'T CRY!** Acton High teacher Nancy Mistruzzi (left) introduces two Baby Think It Over dolls to French Immersion parenting class students Amanada Cunneyworth (Grade 10) and James Mashinter (Grade 11).

that babies need to be responded to quickly.

"The Baby Think It Over is primarily marketed as pregnancy prevention, but we're using it to demonstrate how important response is to an infant and that parenting is a very difficult and lifelong challenge," explained Mistruzzi on Thursday.

Mistruzzi, mother of a 14-month old, understands the student's apprehension and anticipation as they learned to care for the dolls this week.

"Some students are wondering what they've got themselves. I had one girl

worried that she wasn't going to be a good enough parent," Mistruzzi said, adding the students will keep a journal of their experiences.

Grade 10 student Amanda Cunneyworth takes it all very seriously.

"I've told my friends that I'm going to be over protective. I don't want to fail," Cunneyworth said Sunday.

"I'm treating the doll I have now like a real baby as much as I can and I know that I'm not having a baby while I'm in school."

The dolls have three settings, easy, normal and cranky, and a random selec-

tion is made for each student who gets a wristband with a care key that must be inserted into the baby's back and held, until the crying stops. The computer records all of the

response times and incidents of neglect or physical abuse.

Mistruzzi said they hope this exercise will give students a real idea of what parenting is all about.

"Often times teen moms come into the school and their babies are so cute and everyone wants to hold them. These dolls are also very cute and everyone wants to hold

them, until it's 2 o'clock in the morning and it's screaming and you're the only one with the key."

Acton High needs some baby items to make the experience as real as possible. The list includes an infant carseat, two infant strollers, two diaper bags, baby bottles and clothing, accessible through the back.

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## Torch run today for Olympics

The lighting of the 1998 Flame of Hope will kick off the 12th annual Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics at Halton Regional Police Headquarters in Oakville today (Thursday). The run will continue for 9 km to the Oakville Arena to officially open the Ontario Special Olympics Provincial Spring Games.

From May 7 to July 7, law enforcement runners will take up the torch in a cross-province relay in support of Ontario Special Olympics, a grass roots, year-round sports program for athletes who have mental handicaps. This year, more than 8,000 law enforcement personnel will cover over 8,000 km and converge in Sudbury on July 7 for the Canadian Special Olympic 1998 Summer Games.

Last year the Ontario Law Enforcement Torch Run raised \$1.5 million for Special Olympics.

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