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ALGONQUIN -- Fasten seat belt. Adjust mirrors. Check blind spots before backing out of the parking spot.

Carly Biddle went through all of the motions as she prepared to take off in the H.D. Jacobs High School driver's education car on a recent morning. The 15-year-old sophomore has been taking driver's education for about four weeks and was into her third hour of behind-the-wheel experience.

In addition to practicing with a licensed instructor and accumulating 30 hours of classroom instruction, teens seeking their Illinois license must spend at least 50 hours driving with a parent or guardian.

Graduated licensing laws that went into effect this year have made parents more responsible for teens' driving education, said driver's education instructors for Community Unit School District 300.

The year-old laws give teens more time to gain experience behind the wheel under the guidance of a parent or guardian, limit in-car distractions and require teens to earn their way from one stage to the next by avoiding traffic convictions. Teens must remain in good standing under their permit instruction for nine months prior to applying for a license. They are also prohibited from using a cell phone while driving, driving after 10 p.m. on weekdays or 11 p.m. on weekends and having more than one passenger under 20 in the vehicle. In 2007, the number of hours teens must spend in a car with a guardian increased from 25 to 50.

Illinois legislators increased the restrictions on teen drivers in an attempt to reduce traffic crashes and fatalities involving young drivers. It seems to be working.

Dramatic drop in deaths

From Jan. 1 to April 15, 22 teens between ages 16 and 19 died in accidents on Illinois roadways. There were 57 deaths among youths those ages during the same period in 2007.

"Based on statistics, since 1998, teen driving deaths have decreased dramatically," said Jacobs driver's education instructor John Sarna.

A major advance in keeping teens safe on the road has been the increased time they spend with another adult giving them driving tips.

"Before, all of the pressure was put on the driver's education teacher," Sarna said. "Now the parents share the responsibility in educating their child. It's made a major change in teen safety."

Instructors said that because the amount of time parents spend with their children behind the wheel has increased, the instructors have had to educate parents about safe driving skills as well.

"Fifty hours is a lot of time," Sarna said. "Parents run out of ideas. We suggest what to work on."

Instructors said teens tend to emulate their parents' behavior -- including driving habits.

"Adults have to be the role model," said instructor Eliseo Saldivar.

Saldivar said the earlier that parents take teens out to practice driving, the better success instructors have.

"A lot of times, parents aren't taking kids out because they know they have nine months. They want us to give the basics," Saldivar said.

"There's a big difference between kids who practice with parents and those who don't," added instructor Kurt Bentsen. "You can see the ones who have been out more have more confidence."

Extra driving helps

Biddle and fellow sophomore Jen Gilligan, who have been driving only a few weeks, said they had little confidence before beginning driver's education classes. The duo said turning the vehicle was difficult and that coming to a stop could be jerky. The girls said they have only been out a handful of times with family members for extra practice.

But senior triplets Robin, Brittany and Ashley Lasak -- who are 17 and got their licenses in 2007 -- said all of the extra driving hours they put in with their parents really paid off.

"More hours in the car are going to make you a better driver with more experience," Robin said.

The triplets said many teens do allow themselves to be distracted by cell phones or friends in the car.

"(The police) aren't going to stop every person with four young people in the car," Ashley said.

"It's up to the parents to enforce it," Brittany added.

But Jacobs instructors hope that as the laws become more familiar, people will take them seriously.

"We're the leader in the country as far as graduated licensing," Saldivar said. "Illinois is looked at as the model."