

- **North Bay Haven students given charge of the classroom**
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Kyra Kooley and Todd Harris help Amaya Bazemore with a math problem Tuesday at North Bay Haven Middle School.

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News Herald Reporter

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PANAMA CITY — The three teachers running the eighth-grade North Bay Haven Middle School math class didn't have teaching certificates. They hadn't gone to college, and none of them even had a driver's license.

Instead, the educators guiding the class through the finer intricacies of a box-and-whisker plot were Todd Harris, Melissa Martin and Kyra Kooley, eighth-graders teaching their fellow classmates.

Math teacher Frank Luke, hoping to motivate his students and create better engagement with the subject, recently decided to change how his class was structured. Instead of lecturing every 45-minute period, he asked himself, why not let the students teach themselves?

"If you put the onus of responsibility on them, they will do it," he said.

On Tuesday, Todd, Melissa and Kyra went through the normal stresses of a classroom: helping their students, working through technical hiccups, even disciplining their classmates for talking. They also helped their peers on an individual basis, collaborating together to find the answer and imparting tips and shortcuts they had learned to get through the problems.

"The kids really do relate better to their peers," said Angel Forehand, whose daughter, Lilly Casady, had taught the previous period.

Forehand came in to watch her daughter teach a class on finding the volume of a container. Since Lilly volunteered to teach the subject, Forehand said she has seen a marked improvement in her daughter's performance. Lilly herself admitted she had been procrastinating and struggling with her work, but teaching motivated her to master the subject. She even came to school 30 minutes early to work with Luke and ensure she had everything covered.

"You have to have a better understanding to be able to teach it," said eighth-grader Leanna Herring, who also has taught the class.

The teachers are all volunteers, Luke said, and no one is forced to teach a class if they don't want to. When he first brought up the idea of having students teach themselves, Luke said many of the students were scared, but a small group of students — including Harris, Martin and Kooley — jumped at the chance.

"Now, more and more students are asking," he said.

Luke said the approach has had an impact on students of all performance levels, but has helped traditionally low performing students the most. He has implemented the program in all his classes and said he hopes to see the new approach spread to other subjects throughout the school.

"We want to create a movement," he said. "A little move here or there will not suffice."