

Radford High School students benefit from NMSI grant

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In 2011, the United States ranked 52nd in the quality of mathematics and science education, and fifth (and declining) in overall global competitiveness, according to the World Economic Forum's 2011 The Global Competitiveness Report.

Radford High School is trying hard to reverse this trend through an Initiative for Military Families grant from the National Math and Science Initiative (NMSI) organization. This is intended to provide consistent, high-level science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education in high schools serving high populations of students from military families.

This is the third and final year of the NMSI grant, and for Malia Kau, college and career counselor, it has been a godsend. Before the NMSI grant, only 78 students took math, science or English advanced placement (AP) exams.

This school year, there are 184 students who will be taking the AP final exam in math, English and science AP exams. Moreover, many are taking more than one AP course.

"The culture at Radford is changing with more students wanting to take more rigorous classes and talking about college as compared to the years before the grant," Kau said. Three Radford 12th grade students are very appreciative for the benefits and learning opportunities as a result of this grant.

Corey Snider, an Air Force family member, took three AP courses during the 11th grade: language, world history and calculus A/B and is taking four AP courses this year: calculus B/C, physics, statistics and English literature. He has already been accepted and offered a \$90,000 scholarship to Illinois Institute of Technology. For Snider, the AP classes he was able to take confirmed his desire of majoring in architectural engineering in college.

Megan Joaquin, a Navy family member, took AP language and AP statistics during the 11th grade and is now taking AP calculus A/B this year. She wants to major in pre-pharmacy and eventually become a pharmacist.

Nicole Fernandez is a non-military student who said she has benefited greatly from this NMSI Radford grant and is thankful that Radford was a recipient of the NMSI grant. She started in the 10th grade with AP U.S. history, then AP biology and AP language in the 11th grade and now AP calculus, AP statistics, AP environmental science and AP literature in her senior year.



Radford High School students, Megan Joaquin, Corey Snider and Nicole Fernandez, discuss an AP calculus problem recently at Radford High School. Photo courtesy of Radford High School

The expanded AP opportunities made possible by this grant enabled her to push and challenge herself for harder classes. She has already been accepted into Colorado State University. Fernandez wants to major in animal science and zoology with the goal of becoming a veterinarian.

For Fernandez, a major benefit was the Saturday study session from 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. every other month with four different parts taught by different AP teachers from Radford and other schools.

“It definitely gave me different perspectives on the subject matter,” she said.

“NMSI spurred my interest in studying more challenging subjects, and I feel more prepared to enter college. The grant even paid for our school bus to the Saturday classes and our lunch,” Snider said.

“The teachers made the subject matter interesting and reinforced my interest in the medical field and becoming a pharmacist,” Joaquin said. “My older brother attended and graduated from Radford before this NMSI grant, and I’m really lucky that I was born the ‘right time.’”

“Before the grant, only the top students took AP classes. Now students are taking the challenging courses who weren’t in honors classes before. If there are any people who can fund to keep it going, this is a program that definitely benefits everyone: our teachers, students and families,” Kau said.