



GOOSE CREEK

CONSOLIDATED INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT



Kailey Thomas works a problem in her OnRamps dual credit pre-calculus class at Ross S. Sterling High School with some help from her teacher Judy Bender. Students will earn high school credit as well as a college math credit from the University of Texas.

OnRamps Course Prepares Students for College

Students in Judy Bender's OnRamps classes truly understand the meaning of critical thinking. In its initial year, the dual enrollment pre-calculus class will allow the thirty-eight Ross S. Sterling students enrolled the opportunity to receive high school credit as well as three hours of math credit from the University of Texas (TCCN:Math 2312 UT M305G), but it doesn't come easy.

"We use Inquiry Based Learning (IBL). I answer a question with a question to guide them to the answer," said Bender.

Bender admits that her teaching style fits well with the way this course is taught, but to have the opportunity to teach it, she was required to attend two weeks of training and follow-up training sessions. The course is challenging for the students, but it also provides some challenges for the teacher.



Nathan Harper, a RSS junior in Judy Bender's OnRamps dual credit pre-calculus class, smiles as he figures out a concept in an exploration activity.

"It's very challenging. It's a different style of teaching, and we learn a lot as a group," said Harper. "It was tough to get used to at first, but it's worked out well."

Students receive a high school grade from Bender as a result of test grades, homework, quizzes and explorations. The college grade comes from UT and is earned by tests

"I feel like I have grown as a teacher this year. Even though I am teaching the same material that I have taught for several years, I am looking at it in a different way. This has deepened my understanding of concepts as well as my students' understanding," said Bender.

The course was designed by Dr. Mark Daniels at UT, and the instructor of record is UT professor Jeremiah Lucas, who provides support to Bender and her students. It is divided into seven units, each with an over-arching theme. Each unit includes a series of explorations designed to engage students and empower them to develop their problem-solving skills.

"The way the course was designed they are forced to look elsewhere for information, Whether that is from their peers, textbooks, the Internet, or me, they have risen to the challenge. The teacher is not supposed to tell the answers; we are supposed to guide them to discovering the answers. In that regard, I believe these students will be better prepared for the next stage of their life," said Bender.

Although they are working harder and using their critical thinking skills more, the students, who will enroll in AP calculus next year, feel they are reaping the benefits of the course.

"It's a lot of hard work and it tests your knowledge," said Leah Woods, RSS junior. "You have to push yourself – you can't just cruise through – but it prepares you for college."

Nathan Harper, a junior who plans to attend Sam Houston State University to major in environmental science, took the class to earn his college credit for pre-cal.

and explorations, and students have the option of accepting the grade for their transcripts. If a student goes to UT, the grade will transfer, but just the credit goes to any other college or university. For this year and also next year, a grant makes the class free for students.

"It's the best deal out there," said Julie McReynolds, RSS academic dean. "We're really excited to offer this course. Our kids love it! It's true college prep for them, and they should do well in AP calculus next year. For next year, one OnRamps class has already made, and we hope to have enough sign up for another class."

Although it's a math course, the concepts students learn will apply to other subjects as well.

"It really does prepare you for college," said Gabriela Garcia. "It's rigorous, and it teaches you to study at home by yourself and in class."

The first year of a new class is always tough, and Bender has been pleased with the progress of her students as well as with the support she has received from the RSS faculty and staff.

"No matter whether it is another math teacher, a science teacher or a teacher of another dual credit course, everyone has been great about helping me," said Bender. "I always knew that we had a great staff. This year it has been reinforced in my mind. I also believe that I have the support of the administration, and it has made my job just a little easier."

Any Sterling High School student who plans to take pre-AP pre-calculus during the 2016-2017 school year and is interested in the OnRamps course should contact his or her counselor or the academic dean at RSS.

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