

Saunders Trades & Technical High School

Yonkers City School District

School context

Saunders Trades & Technical High School is part of the Yonkers City School District, which sits on the urban fringe of New York City. It opened in 1909 as the first public vocational school in New York. It serves 1350 students, of whom 45% are Latino; 69% are eligible for free lunch and another 7% for reduced price lunch, giving an over total of and 76% of students from low income backgrounds. In 1997-8, Saunders was recognized as a Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education and in 2005-6 as a High Performing and Gap Closing School by New York State. It was also listed by *U.S. News and World Report* in 2008 as being among the best schools in 40 states.

Student Demographics 2005-2006: Saunders Trades & Technical High School, Yonkers CSDⁱ

	Saunders Trades & Technical High School	Yonkers City SD	New York State
% Eligible for Free Lunch	69%	63%	37%
% Eligible for Reduced Lunch	7%	9%	8%
% Limited English Proficient	3%	17%	N/A
Student Ethnic/Racial Distribution			
% African-American	17%	29%	20%
% Hispanic/Latino	45%	48%	20%
% White	31%	17%	53%
% Other	7%	6%	7%
% Students Meeting or Exceeding State Standards on Secondary Level English Assessments	79%	56%	69%
% Students Meeting or Exceeding State Standards on Secondary Level Mathematics	74%	54%	71%
% Students Graduating	87%	55%	67%
Total Enrollment	1,395	23,666	2,772,669

Yonkers School District, the 4th largest in New York State, has 29 elementary schools, 5 middle schools and 7 high schools, and at all levels offers parents the opportunity to ballot to select the school they wish their child to attend. If needed, a lottery determines assignments.

Specialized themes and instructional philosophies offer real educational choices. Saunders offers three specialized academies – Technological Sciences, Occupational Sciences, and Vocational Sciences. Like Saunders, other Yonkers high schools each have specific academic and magnet options, which include:

- College Board Academy – for college preparatory studies
- Gorton HS – for computer sciences, law and public service, medical professions; horticulture and building maintenance

- Lincoln HS – for education, business and finance, and arts.
- Riverside HS – for engineering and design
- Roosevelt HS – for humanities, communications, fine arts, public service, mathematics, and engineering, technology & science, and Transitional Bilingual Education
- Yonkers HS –for an International Baccalaureate Diploma and Transitional Bilingual Education.

Parents need to be an active part of the choice process, and must ballot in 8th grade to secure their high school of choice. Students at Saunders must ballot again in 9th grade to choose their magnet of focus for the rest of high school. With its magnets, Saunders offers small learning communities within the school. Students in the Ninth Grade Academy are structured into teams taught by core teachers using interdisciplinary instruction and are introduced to Technological, Occupational, and Vocational Sciences during the spring semester. Ninth graders then ballot to join one of the three academies in their tenth grade:

- The Technological Sciences Academy, the only academy with academic entrance requirements, offers Architectural Technology, Constructional and Facilities Management, Environmental Technology, and Chemical Technology.
- The Occupational Sciences Academy offers Cosmetology, Culinary Arts and Restaurant Management, Fashion Design, and Graphic Communications and Pre-Press Productions.
- The Vocational Sciences Academy focuses on Automatic Heating/Air Conditioning, Automotive Mechanics, and Carpentry.

With its strong reputation, Saunders has a long waiting list. Administrators and teachers view Saunders Trades & Technical High School as unique. Not only is the turnover of teachers low, but graduates of Saunders come back to teach. What makes teachers want to stay, and what makes parents eager to get their children into this high school?

Highlights

Three particular features of Saunders stood out during the on-site interviews:

- Pride
- Commitment to excellence
- Failure is not an option

Pride

I love it here. I graduated from here; I coached football here. I love this place. (teacher)

You can't hide Saunders pride. (a banner within the school building)

We're unique. (teacher)

We take pride in being a good school. It's precious to us. (teacher)

Saunders displays its pride throughout the building. A huge display of college acceptance letters pasted on the hallway wall implies a large number of students accepted into various colleges.

This display is also intended to plant a seed in other students' minds that college is a possibility. Another poster shows a large thermometer corresponding to the amount of college scholarships and aid awarded to seniors so far – close to \$3.5 million in early May. Many of Saunders' students go on to college – at least 87 % in 2005-6 (the state average is 55%).

Teachers are proud of the magnet curriculum, and in how the school prepares students not only for college, but also for jobs and professions. Each magnet program conducts a yearly display or show, like the Architecture Open House, or the Cosmetology Dinner and Hair Show, which are honored with photos on the bulletin board. Teachers also up the ante in their magnets by entering competitions. This year Saunders' Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning students won the New York Oil Heating Service Managers Annual Competition against two other schools. Saunders students earned silver at the New York State SkillsUSA competition in April 2008 by answering questions on general academic knowledge, professional development, and current events.

Yonkers School District further fosters pride in its schools by forging partnerships with Yonkers civic, business and community organizations, as well as cultural institutions and colleges. This collaboration with partners enriches student learning with “a community of learners” – the district's focus for 2007-8. An Education Summit 2008 attracted more than 200 business and community leaders to hear NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg talk about the importance of nurturing the community in support of its schools. The Mayor of Yonkers is a frequent guest at school events. The Superintendent of Schools conducts Superintendent's Community Forums throughout the year and frequents Yonkers schools on a weekly basis – everyone knows him. Administrators at Saunders are in and out of classrooms regularly. There is vibrancy to the Saunders' community, where people not only know what's going on, but are proud to be part of the momentum.

The district uses many public relations' tools to share its current activities and accomplishments, including a web site, a cable TV channel, community newsletter, annual calendar, and an automated phone call system. The comprehensive district website contains several videos. One shows the spectacular efforts of the first Saunders Robotics team, which made it to the regionals (winning the Rookie Team Award) and to the finals in Atlanta, where overseas teams participated as well. Other videos show a recommended strategy for preparing classroom lessons and a breakfast the district held with Yonkers realtors. Cablevision Channel 75 WDMC-TV is a Yonkers School District cable TV channel, run by Roosevelt High School, that provides educational programming to students and residents in the City of Yonkers. On any particular day one might watch an elementary school band perform, the proceedings of the Audit, Budget and Finance Committee meeting, moments from the Valedictorian/Salutatorian Dinner, and other updates from the schools. This district uses public media in creative and powerful ways to celebrate accomplishments and to keep its community well informed. In 2007-8 the Yonkers Public Schools website, calendar, and handbook earned highest honors in the 28th Annual New York State School Public Relations Association Communications Contest. The media offer a window into the workings of the district and provide a sense of momentum as well as how a large urban district takes great pride in excelling.

Commitment to Excellence

We have a demand for educational excellence and more extensive learning than the mere reading, writing and arithmetic approach. (teacher)

*Our mission and vision is always to keep making students successful, to move forward.
(administrator)*

It's a big city, but it's very personalized in terms of our approach. (administrator)

The demand for excellence runs through all layers of the Yonkers School District. According to administrators, the district strives to stay ahead and to remain on the cutting edge in terms of using research-based practices in the academic and magnet curriculums. For example, the district is supporting literacy initiatives across all content areas. It relies on partners to help them think beyond what they do everyday.

The district also cultivates and expects the best of its leaders, who undertake professional reading each year. They strive to support teachers to do the best they can do. Ideas are infused from district to school to classroom. Recently the district created a WOW factor (wonderful outstanding work) New Years Eve party for teachers on their first day back. The principal of Saunders then created the WOW factor at his own school on the first day students attended. Teachers were met with a red carpet, stars with their names on the school ceiling, and were awarded “Saundies” (Oscars) to celebrate a particular talent. Students, too, were celebrated on their first day.

Students in grades 9-12 at Saunders are required to complete college preparatory courses (e.g., two years of a foreign language plus Regents level courses) together with a three-year major selected from the 13 technical and trades programs in three Academies. Students from all Academies are reported to enroll in AP classes. The competitions and annual displays and shows discussed above also demonstrate the commitment to excellence. Teachers and administrators push students to achieve.

Teachers are also supported in their quest for success. The teacher who wanted to start a Robotics team told the administration that \$30,000 was needed. Although the budget-squeezed school could easily have said, “No,” instead they looked for and found the money. When the team made it to the nationals, again thousands of dollars were needed for the team to be able to travel to the finals. The Yonkers School District was instrumental in securing the funds for the Robotics program, as it was evident how important the project was. Another huge financial contribution came in the way of an endowment of \$20,000 by a citizen whose only stake was to see the interest of engineering grow among students. Support also came from Con Edison in the form of monetary assistance and volunteering man hours, as well as many grassroots companies who gave in the same manner. One teacher’s dream came true, nurturing and exciting a whole novice robotics team beyond their own wildest dreams in making the finals. At every level, optimism and a commitment to excellence speak loudly – that success is possible.

Although Saunders is a big city school, it is able to create small communities that personalize instruction and nurture connections between students and teachers. The magnets like to encourage students into post secondary education, though some students choose to claim jobs straight away. Whatever the choice, students know they are well equipped with the skills they need to succeed.

Failure Is Not an Option

[Teachers] bend over backwards to see every kid pass. (teacher)

I'm on top of my kids. I'm very thorough. I look after them. (teacher)

*You must have constant communication and intervention. That is the key to success.
(guidance personnel)*

Saunders provides a variety of support services and programs and a positive teacher and administrator focus to help students. There is after school help, where every teacher, by contract, must post after-school office hours at least once a week, though most stay to help on a regular basis. A Saturday Academy operates weekly, with teachers paid to help students with school work and prep for exams. National Honor Society tutors are available to tutor during school hours. A Comprehensive Alternative Reform Educational Program (C.A.R.E.) or Twilight High School Academy provides a non traditional educational setting for students seeking to complete requirements for a high school diploma. The Academy was established to allow students who are not meeting graduation requirements in regular school to attend school at night (4pm- 8:30pm).

Students are supported in their quest for college entrance with 12-week SAT prep classes offered twice a year at no cost or greatly reduced fees to students. Yonkers' goals to increase access, aspirations, achievement and attendance in college are helped by the GEAR UP Program, which gives 8th grade students support services to assist in their transition from middle school to high school and to post secondary education. GEAR UP workshops are offered to parents in English and Spanish.

A school-to-home automatic telephone notification system allows the district office or the school to communicate emergencies, school events, and homework announcements to parents as often as needed, with the Saunders principal reported to be its most frequent user. He can reach all students' homes with one phone call in a matter of minutes. Individual parents are contacted immediately by a teacher or administrator when a problem arises, and administrators even travel to students' homes and neighborhoods to find those who might be cutting school.

A Closer Look

The characteristics described above -- pride in Saunders, demand for excellence, and never contemplating failure as an option -- are evident across five broad themes that frame the best practices study of which this case is one partⁱⁱ. The sections that follow discuss specific practices at Saunders Trades & Technical High School within each theme.

Curriculum and Academic Goals

The programs that we have at Saunders are so worthwhile that you really see it making a difference in the kids' lives. (teacher)

Our Partners are significant in helping us to think beyond what we do every day. (district administrator)

Some kids don't want to leave. We're giving them something positive. (teacher)

Yonkers School District's first stated goal for 2007-8 is to ensure a "world-class education for every student." The district is committed to a vision that "exceeds" student needs and expectations and that focuses on academic success and instructional expertise. It lists specific academic objectives for their high schools for the current year as:

- Increasing the number of students passing NYS Regents exams by 10%.
- Increasing the number of students who will graduate high school by 5%.

Objectives for grades 3-8 are just as specific and target, in particular, increasing the percentage of students achieving the highest levels and decreasing the number achieving the lowest levels on the NYS English Language Arts and Math exams.

The Superintendent of Yonkers also has four non-negotiable goals for the district:

Goal 1: Student achievement – across the board improvement in State Assessments and an increase in annual graduation rates.

Goal 2: Instructional improvements

Goal 3: Collaborative supervision of staff.

Goal 4: Community outreach.

Two years ago, to respond to state curriculum changes in mathematics, the district brought together elementary and middle school teachers, then middle school and high school teachers, to understand and plan for the vertical alignment that would be needed. Another committee last year looked at social studies texts; and the district is supporting literacy initiatives across all content areas.

Saunders follows a district-wide unified core curriculum based on New York State Standards, but is also committed to an interdisciplinary approach to learning by combining vocational, occupational, technical and academic instruction. The State Standards, posted in every classroom, are seen as an important guideline and a high priority because all students have to pass Regents exams in core courses. However, all teachers interviewed say they go far beyond the standards. They express a feeling that standards "stifle creativity," are "vague," and are way "too low" in preparing students for the 21st century. For these reasons teachers mention flexibility in finding materials to make core classes more interesting and challenging.

Standards are supported with curriculum maps, pacing guides, and materials developed by teachers. Curriculum maps are continually revised and refined. Flexibility is the key in looking back and looking to what research has to say. One district administrator reports a considerable amount of time and effort has been spent on curriculum maps through the Professional Development Department, the Department of Funded Programs, and the School Improvement Department. He emphasizes the fluid nature of the maps and of the need to continually move with the times. A current science initiative with a partner university involves working with high school teachers to examine curriculum and look at pacing charts to ensure equity from one high school to the next and to create a standard that teachers are expected to meet if students move from one high school to another.

The 9th-grade curriculum is common for all students at Saunders, where they are also able to get a taste of the magnets offered in grades 10-12. In tenth grade, students specialize according to the

academy they have chosen. The magnet teachers are able to design and revise their curriculum, as well as decide how to teach it. However, programs like Automotive Technology are evaluated every four years, and teachers need to take courses over the summer and at nights to keep up their own training and license requirements. Saunders' challenge is to remain on the cutting edge in each of the magnet areas as they prepare students for fields that may be rapidly changing. In addition to a district-wide advisory council for career and technical education, each program at Saunders tries to keep abreast with career development, industry standards, and other changes in their field through Craft Advisory Committees consisting of representative from small companies and shops in the industry. "They tell us this is where we need to go and the direction we need to lead our children," says the principal. "If it weren't for those partnerships, I don't know that we would be . . . where we are." Students are prepared for post-secondary technical programs as well as the workforce upon high school graduation.

One challenge has been money – what to do when grant money runs out. Change and forward thinking come with a cost. Yonkers has been the recipient of a number of grants this year:

- Federal magnet grants for \$10 million over 10 years.
- A Department of Justice partnership with local law enforcement social services and the courts to track truancy. Once a student has 10 days of unexcused absences, district administrators want to seek to have parents charged with educational neglect.
- Health issues – Yonkers has twice the national average of asthma. Two local hospitals have clinics in many schools.

With the help of a \$3.3 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education, the district will expand a Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) model to the high school level to give students more personalized and individualized academic and social advancement. Yonkers is the only district in the state to receive the grant this year. Given the increased achievement on ELA and Math at the lower grade levels, they expect increased high school graduation rates to follow. An additional high school based on the Saunders model is scheduled to open, which will result in lower enrolment numbers across the board for Yonkers high schools and added choice in programs for Yonkers high school students.

A \$1.2 billion 12-Year Restructuring Plan has been put into place. A core model was developed, and the district sees it as a "catalyst" of what Yonkers schools should look like with regard to class sizes, science labs, and resources. It upholds their strong belief that all schools should have the same facilities regardless of which section of town they lie in. It also supports the strong belief that Yonkers stays a district of choice.

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

*This is a really sought after school. People don't leave; these are coveted positions.
(teacher)*

I wanted to be the teacher that I never had. (building administrator)

Saunders has a very committed staff. (district administrator)

Staff turnover at Saunders is low and teachers do not want to leave. Teachers in the district can "post-in" when positions do become vacant, qualifying by seniority. If no one qualified chooses

to post in or a vacancy occurs too late in the summer, the principal may hire by interviewing candidates and recommending them to the central office for approval and appointment. Several teachers and administrators mention that former Saunders' students come back to teach, especially in the trades. "I guess their education proves Saunders was very positive for them so they have come back."

Magnet trades teachers are recruited by putting a committee together and finding the best candidate. Trades teachers tend to have a business mindset, as they come from industry, they are all licensed, and many continue to work in their trade and maintain their certification. Thus many recruits come with experience, and so start with a higher salary. In addition to trades knowledge, the candidate has to be the best fit for the students and needs to understand the make up of the school. A district administrator says that Saunders has a very committed staff and has hired some very fine magnet teachers.

Saunders emphasizes a family climate and tight community in its building. Students feel safe. A building administrator claims, "It's infectious when you have new people coming in and they see the relationship that's built with students and families." He strongly believes in the "buy-in" law, that a school must get people on board to see its vision. Many community events are organized to make parents feel comfortable visiting the school, and the school makes extra efforts to reach out to parents. One teacher reports, "I've never seen a parent complain about lack of access."

Within the community atmosphere, leadership is strong. An assistant principal is responsible for each grade level at Saunders, and they move up with students each year.

A Leadership Academy for both district and building administrators sees them engaged in professional reading over the summer. The books are chosen by the superintendent and recently have included *From Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don't* (Collins), *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence* (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee), and *Failure Is Not an Option: Six Principles That Guide Student Achievement in High-Performing Schools* (Blankstein). Their meeting agendas have to reflect a quote from the current book. They report taking many strategies and tips about leadership from their readings and that a new conversation has emerged from these readings and has changed their leadership style. One building administrator says, "If you're trying to lead by example...it filters down (to teachers)" and adds that everyone sees that going beyond what is normally expected becomes part of the culture of the school.

The district's professional development initiatives are focused on proven successful programs and instructional practices that are research based. Professional development includes:

- Instruction and support to both tenured and non-tenured staff, fulfilling state and local mandated training requirements;
- The Leadership Academy for administrators;
- Resources and information on current issues in education and
- Mentoring for both non-tenured staff and new administrators.

Topics for professional development may come from the district, from the building level and from department chair meetings. One teacher mentions that Yonkers is very good in paying teachers for professional development. For example, a social studies teacher was sent to Chicago in the summer to learn a particular way of preparing lessons to motivate students according to learning styles.

Professional development is mandatory for new teachers. In their first year they must complete 36 hours; in their second year, 24 hours; and in their third year, 12. New teachers must also take part in five days of “Visions Training” before the start of the school year. A building administrator is assigned to each new teacher. They collect lesson plans, observe the teachers and nurture them during the early years: “Our job is to create a good teacher.”

The district and the union negotiated a new method of evaluating staff, beginning this year – in addition to the two formal observations, monthly walk throughs by a principal or assistant principal. These visits are unannounced, and the principal reports that teachers’ initial concerns have changed to invitations: “I want to show you what I’m doing today.” Such observations can last 5-20 minutes and are followed by written feedback (often an email), including a request for a meeting, if needed. Thus by the end of the year, every staff member has had nine informal and two formal evaluations. The superintendent reports that instruction is better as a result of these walk throughs and student management is less of a concern because teachers are better prepared. The idea of the walk throughs came about through one of the district’s higher education partnerships and has included coaching for the building administrators.

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

A priority is to move the youngsters along to a successful place in their life...college, trade, technology or a profession. (teacher)

[Kids] want to come to Saunders; they know [work is] tougher here. (teacher)

When [students] feel they have more control over the classes they can take, they take more responsibility for what they are doing and are successful. (teacher)

If instruction is relevant, students are going to achieve (district administrator)

Saunders is determined to remain on the cutting edge by maintaining high quality teaching and improving performance on high stakes tests. School leaders make sure that teachers implement a standards aligned curriculum in core areas to which teachers add and enrich. Because Yonkers is a district of choice, administrators feel that competition among schools pushes them to excel. Yonkers provides instructional support to principals and teachers in four areas: supervision of teachers, curriculum development, professional development, and consultant services.

The magnets at Saunders are small communities where teachers work together with the same students from tenth through twelfth grade. The magnet program requires an extended school day of 9 periods, which is longer than other Yonkers high schools. Magnets use a three-period block to teach theory and provide hands on instruction. The magnets work with group projects, and administrators and teachers report a move toward more project-based learning in the core academic areas as well. The magnet programs also hold events that are major shows of skill. For example, Fashion Design students present an annual Fashion Show, at which they display work they have designed and made, including, often, their own prom dresses. Magnet students also have work thrust at them – fashion students receive clothing in need of alterations, and automotive students fix cars. Senior students can participate in the Cooperative Work Experience

Program, if it is offered in their major, or they can participate in an internship or mentoring program.

More rigorous classes have been added to Saunders Trades & Technical High School. In 1990 the school offered no AP classes, now it offers 10. One teacher speaks of how they have benefited from offering more challenging classes, mentioning increased graduation rates. Another part of the improvement plan was to alert parents about higher level courses after seeing that the underserved were not involved. Community forums and some 40-50 Title 1 meetings at night and on Saturdays walk parents through the New York State Assessment process. Now more students are taking high level courses.

The challenge remains for Saunders to make sure that everyone is achieving – both in academics, and in career and technical education. A building administrator says, “It’s about knowing that their training over their four years at Saunders has led them in a direction that makes them take responsibility for their actions in the future.”

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

We devote a lot of time to emphasizing data. It sends a clear message about where the strengths and deficiencies are. (district administrator)

If we don’t continue to be flexible and look at what research tells us, we are not being responsible. (district administrator)

Get to know your kids. It’s just so important. (building administrator)

There is collective accountability for student learning at Saunders, at the district, building and classroom levels. The district examines tests to see what weaknesses there may be and then decides how best to help teachers and students reach clearly articulated goals. Data are collected, organized and shared. District leaders also look to research and cutting edge professional reading.

Saunders teachers report using both traditional and alternative assessments. Students are required to take New York State Regents exams, and, particularly in magnet courses, they also must complete end-of-year major projects, folders, portfolios and performances.

As part of the new monthly walk throughs, the principal sets up conferences with individual teachers and creates an individual growth plan if necessary. Leaders hold teachers accountable. When building administrators see a particular need – for example better and more use of rubrics – they request that departments work on common rubrics for their subject areas in regularly scheduled department meetings.

Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustments

We plant the seed of success. (building administrator)

Faculty attends the magnets' shows across the magnets, partly as support for the teachers. (teacher)

I do call parents when kids are cutting. Cutting will lead to failure. (teacher)

Recognition is part of the school ethos. At all levels Saunders staff and students are recognized for their efforts and achievements. Teachers and administrators are celebrated annually with a Hall of Fame for each -- a set of plaques at the entrance to the central office -- with a photo for each Administrator and Teacher of the Year. Student artwork adorns district office corridors.

Saunders students are recognized in many ways: A plaque in the front office lists students who have achieved perfect attendance. In the main hallway are the Principal's Achievement List of seniors, a list of names of students and all colleges to which they have been accepted, plus the huge display of college acceptance letters and the thermometer registering college scholarship totals for 2008. Successful students are recognized at monthly board meetings and highlighted on the website and Channel 75.

Intervention accounts for much of Saunders success. The priority is to get students to graduate and move on to post secondary education. Ninth graders are pre-tested for English, math and earth science, and afternoon tutoring is provided to help raise skill levels. A few years ago, when teachers felt that incoming students were not prepared for high school math, they met with middle school teachers to compare what each level teaches and try to better coordinate it.

One building administrator credits the assistant principals with being the most influential for drop out prevention. Not only do the assistant principals come to really know the students (in part because they stay with a class through all four years), but they also go to student homes if there is a problem. They build relationships with the families. One hears affectionate greetings in the halls ("Hey Champ!") that sound and feel sincere.

Guidance counselors, too, follow a grade level of students through to graduation. "We are a family," reports one counselor. Guidance offers academic counseling in many areas: They meet with eighth graders about what to expect from the high school experience. They meet one-on-one with high schoolers to review Regents requirements. If students fail classes, they notify students and parents and tell them what is available at night school so students can catch up. They conduct conferences and workshops for students and parents. One counselor discusses how open communication is important, so she doesn't sit in her office but travels the hallways, intervening daily, knowing what's going on. If a student stops attending, guidance makes an appointment for that student to attend a local community college to get a GED. Constant communication is their key to success.

In addition to being available at least one day a week after school, teachers offer Regents and AP review classes on Saturdays, beginning two months before the exams. Teachers keep close tabs on students and are ready to call parents when needed. They make accommodations for special needs, e.g., providing extra scaffolding questions to help a student write an essay.

Saunders students receive much support in preparation for college. More than one English teacher mentions being available to any student to help with college essays or the essays required for the technical competitions. A Saturday morning program for women and minorities in math and science helps them prepare for college. GEAR-UP brings in parents and exposes students to

a variety of support services to assist the transition from middle school to high school and to post secondary education.

Saunders has also added more rigorous AP courses. Believing that more choice will encourage more responsibility and success, the school has also added more electives. College visitations are set up for special education students. College becomes part of the language. One teacher reports, “I don’t think they see themselves as special ed.” She adds that she does not want them graduating with an IEP diploma because “it really doesn’t mean much.”

But interventions are not just about helping struggling students improve performance through remediation by tutoring and counseling. It is also about reaching for enrichment and success through partnerships and in competitions, discussed earlier. Even within magnet choices, the district needs to monitor the relevance of each program. For example, Saunders staff realized that computerized Industrial Design (CID) was a dying trade and that it needed transformation towards the future with mechanical technology. Also, when it became apparent that an Entrepreneurial class didn’t fit the dynamics or goals of the school, it was dropped. With the list of programs and the curriculum within programs, Saunders keeps moving ahead, determined to be up to date with the workforce.

In a Nutshell

Staff at Saunders Trades & Technical High School work together to create a highly successful learning environment. Inspired leadership, fruitful community partnerships and a momentum where everyone – teacher and student – is held to high standards means that quality learning experiences become the norm. The magnet school combines rigorous career training with strong academics, where everyone is held to a direction and a goal. Indeed, one banner hanging in the school sums up the partnership between teachers, administrators, support staff, students, parents and the community – “Together We Make a Difference.”

Saunders Trades & Technical High School
Steven Mazzola, Principal
183 Palmer Road
Yonkers, NY 10701

http://www.yonkerspublicschools.org/schools/schools_shs.php

ⁱ Demographic data are of students in the 2002 entering cohort and are from the 2005-06 New York State Report Card (<https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb/AllDistrict.do>). This case study was conducted in spring 2008.

ⁱⁱ This case study is one of a series of studies conducted by Just for the Kids-New York, beginning in 2005. For the study of high schools, conducted during the 2007-08 school year, research teams investigated ten consistently higher-performing and five average-performing high schools based on student performance on New York State Assessments of English, mathematics, science, and history. Researchers used site-based interviews of teachers and administrators, as well as analyses of supportive documentation, to determine differences in practices between higher- and average-performing schools in the sample. In half the higher-performing schools, from one-third to three-quarters of students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Average-performing schools were matched as closely as possible to the higher performers in terms of student poverty levels, geographic location, size, and student ethnicity. Results were organized along five broad themes that form the framework of the national Just for the Kids study of which the New York study is part. The national study has been sponsored by the National Center for Educational Achievement (NCEA).