

L.A.'s Santee school to team up with Trade-Tech College

Mayor Villaraigosa announces a program to train students in culinary arts and tourism while they complete high school. The goal is to prepare them for both a career and further college education.

By Gale Holland, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer
July 23, 2008

A \$1.2-million program designed to curb galloping high school dropout rates will send Santee Education Complex students to [Los Angeles Trade Technical College](#) to train in culinary arts and tourism Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa announced Tuesday.

Funded by a grant from the James Irvine Foundation,, the three-year program will combine college classes with hands-on work experience to produce graduating seniors who are both college-ready and qualified to join the workforce, officials said. Currently, nearly half of Santee's mostly low-income students drop out



Villaraigosa and his partners set for...

As students in chef toques chopped lettuce behind him, Villaraigosa said that the program is the first of its kind and that others are planned citywide.

"We're no longer thinking of setting our students on a college track only or a work track only," Villaraigosa said to an audience of middle and high school students.

Unlike traditional high school programs that track students into either technical or college preparatory programs, the Santee/Trade-Tech collaboration aims to arm students with a high school diploma, credentials for admission to a university and an associate of arts degree, so they can choose whether to go on with their schooling or enter a trade.

Aimee Nicotera, who teaches in the Santee culinary arts academy, said part of the grant will be used to train teachers on how to help students reach those goals.

Officials said 1,800 students, including some from a separate public policy academy at Santee, are expected to participate in the Trade Tech program.

Santee, which opened in 2005, is one of 10 Los Angeles Unified School District campuses that Villaraigosa assumed control of in an effort to turn around low-performing schools. The mayor said the Santee program would serve as a model for broader plans to link L.A. Unified schools with the community college system.

"Higher education can be intimidating," Nicotera said. "With this program you can decide that it's something . . . totally achievable."

Santee student Juan Ramirez, 15, said his culinary classes had helped to keep school interesting, something that he thought in the long run would cut the high dropout rate.

"If you join something," he said, "you're going to be really into it, and anyway it's a really fun activity."

gale.holland@latimes.com