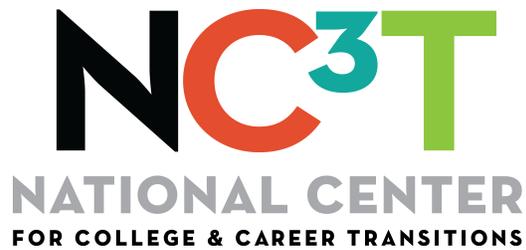


Pathways Profile:

Souderton Area High School
Souderton, PA



BACKGROUND

Souderton Area School District, located in suburban Montgomery County, Pennsylvania 25 miles north of Philadelphia, includes one high school with an approximate enrollment of 2,200 and a graduating class of 500.

Since its conception a decade ago, Souderton Area High School administrators and staff have worked diligently to develop what is now the Pathway 360° Program. Designed to connect today's learning to tomorrow's careers, the program equips students to make informed decisions about their immediate postsecondary plans and their future.

During a freshman Career Exploration course, students explore and choose pathway that will guide the selection of courses in grades ten through twelve. Pathway choices include Industry and Engineering, Business and Communications, Health and Human Services, and Arts and Humanities. A well-developed and highly successful aspect of the Pathway 360° Program is a work-based learning component involving job shadowing and/or mentorship experiences. By connecting classroom learning with real-world applications, students observe and acquire invaluable skills and attitudes. Those completing a job shadow and/or mentorship are also eligible to earn a Pathway or Scholars Diploma.

Each pathway is led by a pathway coordinator, an appointed teacher whose responsibilities include identifying course sequences, organizing experiences for students, and providing guidance to individual students regarding pathways, careers, and the graduation project. The school operates on a block schedule and the fifth block, scheduled twice weekly, serves several functions including opportunities for students to participate in career-related presentations or to meet with their pathway coordinator.

Pathway teachers are encouraged to utilize project-based learning and integrate career exploration throughout their classroom instruction. To support this, teachers are given professional learning time every two years to engage in a one-day externship, visiting a local business of their choice to make connections between curriculum and workplace applications.

Establishing a culture of rigor, relevance, and relationships is an ongoing goal for the administrators and staff at Souderton Area High School and is evidenced in the Pathway 360° Program. Increased enrollment in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and

math) and Advanced Placement courses has exceeded expectations. Offering high-interest courses, career exploration activities, and workplace learning experiences bring relevance to learning. Relationships are cultivated among students with similar career interests, between students and staff during advisory periods, and between students and community members who volunteer time to connect learning with careers.

MILESTONES

2005 - 2009 / PLANNING A NEW HIGH SCHOOL

With unique foresight, school leaders determine that the new high school facility will be designed to support a pathways system. In September 2009, the state-of-the-art building is opened.

SEPTEMBER 2010 - 2011 / PATHWAYS IMPLEMENTED FOR CLASS OF 2015

The Pathway 360° Program, initially referred to as Career Pathways, is designed with a mission “to systematically ensure that all students are engaged in setting goals for their future and in working toward them.”¹

2011-2012 / FRESHMAN COURSE IS MANDATORY

Career Exploration is now mandated for the Pathway 360° Program’s first cohort of students, the class of 2015. During the course, students learn about the pathways offered and select one that will guide their high school course selection. Students may change pathways at any time.

2013-2014 MENTORSHIP PROGRAM IMPLEMENTED

Formerly referred to as internships, the Mentorship Program is intended to provide students with relevant and authentic workplace experiences related to their career interests. A full-time mentorship and transition coordinator position is created and filled by a reassigned teacher; responsibilities include developing procedures and communications, networking with regional businesses, meeting with students, and overseeing program details.

2012 / INCREASE IN COURSE OFFERINGS

While budget restrictions are causing many schools to reduce course offerings, Souderton increases its elective and Advanced Placement classes based on staff and student interests and employer input. New courses include Genetics, Mandarin Chinese I and II, and Advanced Placement Computer Science.

2013 - 2014 / PATHWAYS MANAGER PILOTED

¹ Sam Varano, High School Principal, Community Press Conference held at Souderton Area High School on January 14, 2015

Seeing a need to organize all aspects of the Pathway 360° Program in a user-friendly and relevant way for students, staff, and parents, teacher Michael Olenick develops Pathway Tracker, an online computer application that is piloted in 2013-2014 and fully implemented the following school years with additional features.

SPRING 2014 / JOINED THE PENNSYLVANIA PATHWAYS INNOVATION NETWORK

Souderton Area High School joins the Pennsylvania Pathways Innovation Network (PA PIN), an initiative sponsored by the state department of education and led by the National Center for College and Career Transitions. Through PA PIN, high school administrators and pathway coordinators engage in statewide networking meetings and attend the Academies of Nashville Study Visit. Souderton Area High School also hosts a well-attended study visit for fellow PA PIN members.

WINTER 2015 / GRADUATION PROJECTS INCLUDE MENTORSHIPS

Although graduation projects have a long history at the high school, the class of 2015 is the first to include their mentorship experiences, sharing reflections and ways in which the experience relates to postsecondary goals. Judged by a faculty panel, each presentation is six minutes with an additional six minutes provided to address judges' questions. Those who complete a mentorship and job shadow are eligible to earn either a Pathway or a Scholars Diploma.

KEY FACTORS OF SUCCESS

- State-of-the-art facility designed with pathways in mind
- Access to the Pathway Manager computer application
- Ongoing development of a growth mindset and culture emphasizing rigor, relevance, and relationships among all stakeholders
- Engaging and relevant workplace experiences for students
- Employer and community engagement
- Support of school district administration, school board, and community

RESULTS

- In 2015, 76% of seniors² completed a 20-hour unpaid mentorship in a field of their choice.
- In 2015, 98% of students passed the graduation project, 65% were distinguished making them eligible for a Pathway or Scholars Diploma.

² This percentage does not include profoundly disabled students or students attending the half-day career and technical center.

- Since 2010, enrollment in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) courses increased 159%.
- Since 2006, enrollment in AP courses increased 355%.
- Approximately 200 local and regional business members are involved in the Pathway 360° Program acting as job shadow and/or mentorship hosts, serving on pathway advisory teams, and volunteering for career-related activities in the school.
- Anecdotally, staff sees an increase in student engagement. Students report increased clarity and understanding of postsecondary college and career goals.
- In 2014, U.S. News & World Report ranked Souderton Area High School 18th in the state and third in Montgomery County.

LOOKING AHEAD

The class of 2015 was the first cohort of students to participate in the Pathway 360° Program for four full years and the expectations were exceeded³. However, ongoing development of the program continues in order to monitor and address staff and students needs and workforce trends. In addition, school leaders hope to establish a course sequence with a local college to combine with a mentorship in selected businesses that will give Souderton students priority in those businesses when they hire.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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³ Sam Varano, High School Principal, Community Press Conference held at Souderton Area High School on January 14, 2015

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