When the space shuttle Enterprise touched down in New York City on Friday, 20 city high school students in crisp, black military uniforms with red trim and gold buttons presented the national flag during “The Star-Spangled Banner.”

It had to be the ultimate thrill for students who work on aircraft every day.

The Aviation Career and Technical Education High School color guard drill team from Sunnyside, Queens, was on hand to greet the shuttle — part of a crowd that included Senator Charles E. Schumer, the actor Leonard Nimoy, astronauts and about 900 other guests.

But for the Aviation High School students, the field trip was particularly meaningful.

“This was a really special day for us because we study airplanes every day,” said Jose Escobar, 17, a senior who battled gusts of wind to carry the American flag during the two-hour ceremony. “I would like to be an astronaut one day and study aerospace engineering.”

Down the service road from the Enterprise hangar is the Aviation High School Annex. This is where Jose and many seniors want to be next year. Top graduates stay one extra year beyond graduation to earn Federal Aviation Administration aircraft certification. They work alongside professional technicians on JetBlue, British Air and Delta airliners.

“This is why I love Aviation High School,” said Amiya Debnath, 18, a senior. “Other schools are boring, but here I learn advanced math and physics with my hands. I work on aircraft three hours a day.”

Amiya was born in Bangladesh, where he often lived without electricity. One night during a blackout, he said, he stared up at the glowing moon and decided he wanted to be an astronaut. When he was 13, Amiya’s family moved to Queens. He said he worked hard to improve his English so he could transfer into Aviation High School in his sophomore year.

Susan Marenoff-Zausner, president of the Intrepid Museum, said the shuttle was being brought to New York for permanent placement on the airline carrier in the Hudson River, to inspire.

“We say, ‘What can the shuttle do for future generations?’ ” Ms. Marenoff-Zausner said. “We want kids to get excited about science, technology and engineering and math, which quite frankly they might not be interested in otherwise.”

The Enterprise will be open to the public in July.

Amiya said that his father wanted him to be a doctor, and that his mother preferred a lawyer. He is staying for his fifth year at Aviation and then plans to study aeronautics in college.

“I still want to be an astronaut,” Amiya said.

[Article/Photo: Elbert Chu for The New York Times SchoolBook]