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In Neighborhoods

BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Putting Health Care Careers into Context

BY NATASHA VON KAENEL

Emmy Zepeda, 18, didn't always know she wanted to make prosthetics. Like most people, she wasn't even sure how someone would do that.

Then she enrolled at Arthur A. Benjamin Health Professions, a high school focused on preparing students for careers in health. Right away in her ninth grade medical sciences class, she learned about many different careers in health care. Her ears pricked at the topic of bioengineering.

During her junior year, Health Professions helped her get a volunteer internship at UC Davis where Emmy shadowed different health professionals. Emmy remembers watching a man get fitted with his prosthetic leg for the first time.

"Everybody was around him, helping him put it on correctly. Then they stood him up, and let go," she recalls. "It was so cool to see his face, to see the emotions of his family members. He started crying. He could finally walk."

Most high school students don't have the opportunity to see moments like this firsthand, and for Emmy, that is what makes her high school so special. "That internship really sealed the deal for me going into prosthetics," she says. "It was really cool seeing how they make them and how they give it to somebody and make their life better."

With the help of The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities grant program, which funds Sacramento City Unified School District's Health Careers Pathway Program, Arthur A. Benjamin Health Professions High School is able to take students on field trips to medical sites, connect students with paid and unpaid internships, provide materials for Health Careers Pathway courses and develop a unique medically integrated curriculum.

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Emmy Zepeda, student at Arthur A. Benjamin Health Professions High School

According to Marla Clayton Johnson, the school's principal, 54 percent of their students who enter post-secondary education programs choose a health care major. And unlike students who have attended more traditional high school programs, many of these students come with a firsthand understanding of what it takes to be a health care professional. This familiarity makes them more comfortable in difficult prerequisite classes than other students who may drop out, overwhelmed.



Emmy Zepeda, a senior at Arthur A. Benjamin Health Professions High School in Sacramento, holds a display arm. A medical sciences pathway class helped pique her interest in prosthetics and now she plans on pursuing a degree in bioengineering. Photo by Natasha von Kaenel

Emmy is currently finishing up her senior project on HPV and cervical cancer, while juggling another health-related internship with SCUSD's Connect Center. When the summer ends, she is off to UC Merced where she will major in bioengineering with hopes of making prosthetic limbs one day.

BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

In 2010, The California Endowment launched a 10-year, \$1 billion plan to improve the health of 14 challenged communities across the state. Over the 10 years, residents, community-based organizations and public institutions will work together to address the socioeconomic and environmental challenges contributing to the poor health of their communities.

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Life Expectancy
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Life Expectancy
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Your **ZIP code** shouldn't predict how long you'll live – but it does. Staying healthy requires much more than doctors and diets. Every day, our surroundings and activities affect how long – and how well – we'll live.

Health Happens in Neighborhoods. Health Happens in Schools.
Health Happens with Prevention.

SCUSD is always looking for health care professionals willing to open up their offices to students for internships or field trips, or to come out to the schools as guest lecturers or advisers on curriculum.
For more information about volunteering for the Health Careers Pathway Program, contact Ann Curtis at Ann-Curtis@scusd.edu.

The
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Building Healthy Communities
www.SacBHC.org

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