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## Perris High Teacher Velma Borrows Receives Golden Bell Award



Perris High School teacher Velma Borrows with the Golden Bell presented for creating the Medical Assisting Program at the campus. The Golden Bell also earned the school a \$1,000 prize from the California School Boards Association.

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Perris High School science teacher Velma Borrows saw a need and crafted a solution.

The need: Training high-school and college students and adults to become medical assistants, those office technicians who meet and greet patients, take vital signs, serve as scribes, dispense medications and otherwise support doctors in private offices, walk-in clinics and urgent care facilities.

The solution: Design and implement a ground-breaking, nationally recognized Medical Assisting curriculum to educate and employ job-ready candidates in the medical field.

Along the way, Borrows earned something she never sought but is grateful for the accolade: The prestigious Golden Bell Award, granted by the California School Board Association for creating an innovative program that benefit students, schools and communities.

"I am grateful for this award but it really belongs to Perris High School and the students who have worked so hard to pursue their dream," Borrows said. "Our hearts are in this program. The students have earned it."

### From Jamaica to Perris

Borrows is an immigrant from Jamaica who earned a degree in medical laboratory technology and worked as a cancer researcher at UC Riverside before taking her talents to Perris High School.

The Medical Assisting Program began in 2007 and since inception more than 600 students have taken part, Borrows said.

The program initially was open to Perris High School sophomores, juniors and seniors but now has expanded to include adults. Students must complete 720 hours of classroom instruction and 180 hours of internship time to graduate the course.

"There are no barriers to entry except a strong desire to work hard and meet the academic requirements for the program," Borrows said.



Medical Assisting Program students Kelley Billingsley and Leslie Quezada plan to take the lessons learned from Perris High School instructor Velma Borrows to forge careers in the health-care field.

It's a crash course in a wide assortment of disciplines required in the medical field.

Students become familiar with chemistry, phlebotomy, physiology, anatomy and biology as well as medical terminology, medical assisting front and back office as well as medical billing and insurance processing while progressing toward their certification. Working with lifelike mannequins contributes to the realistic scenario training that is a staple of the course.

Borrows' students use a prosthetic arm to insert needles, gaining experience about how to inject live patients. Lifelike mannequins show the proper locations of muscles and organs, allowing students to get a three-dimensional look into the workings of the human anatomy.

Students enrolled in the program show their pride by designing the logo for their school-issued scrubs and for the pin they receive during senior award night.

Dian Martin, Perris Union High School District Director of Learning Support Services, has worked with Borrows since the program was created. She calls the Perris High School Medical Assisting program "a showcase" driven by Borrows' expertise and commitment.

"It's her passion," Martin said. "She has built a great relationship with her kids and the community. She's a trailblazer for what she's done at Perris High School for her students."

### Student success

Borrows said nearly 100 percent of students enrolled in the Perris High School Medical Assisting Program complete the classroom portion and that 80 percent fulfill their internship commitments.

Perris High has partnered with Mt. San Jacinto College so students enrolled there can also complete the program.



Velma Borrows runs through a lesson during a recent class at the Perris High School campus.

Borrows said about 10 percent of students are offered full-time jobs upon completing their internships and typically earn \$15 to \$20 an hour.

"Not all students cannot afford or do not want to go to four-year colleges," Borrows said. "They want to earn a living right out of high-school. The medical assisting program is a well-structured, successful, sustainable, hands-on experience that provides skills, employment, college credits and an opportunity to explore other medical careers while having real patient care and clinical experience."

While some graduates seek immediate employment, others apply to nursing schools, work toward Bachelor and Master Degrees or pursue careers in various medical fields like health-care management, nutrition, respiratory therapy, ultrasound technology, medical billing and coding and medical transcribing. A pharmacy technology component will be added to the curriculum in 2019-20.

### Building careers

Students Leslie Quezada, 18, and Kelley Billingsley, 26, say the program has trained them for careers helping people. Quezada said she hopes to return to the Mexican state of Michoacan to help the impoverished residents there as either a family doctor or physician's assistant. A recent Perris High School graduate, Quezada plans to continue her education at Cal State San Bernardino.

"I've learned a whole new skill set," Quezada said.

Billingsley already earned a Bachelor's Degree in Health Care Management prior to enrolling in the Medical Assisting Program. She is currently enrolled in Cal State Bakersfield where she is pursuing a Master's Degree in Medical Administration.

Billingsley said the program has reinforced her commitment to a career in health care. She also praised Borrows for creating a teaching class that's engaging, relevant and needed.

"I feel honored to be part of her class," she said. "It's a privilege to be able to take in her knowledge and wisdom."



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