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**LA Youth Step into College Lab to Explore Careers in the Life Sciences**

*Program connects youth to a growing industry and careers that lead to a living wage*

**Sylmar, CA** – On Saturday, April 18, youth from El Nido Family Centers’ Pacoima FamilySource Center stepped into a college lab at Los Angeles Mission College, gaining exposure to careers in the life sciences through a partnership with BioscienceLA and its Sparks Program.

Students in grades 8–11 conducted experiments alongside instructors and college students, engaging with career paths that can feel out of reach for many young people, especially those facing the greatest barriers to accessing opportunity and achieving economic mobility.

“This could be the beginning,” said Liz Herrera, CEO of El Nido Family Centers. “It’s a high-demand field, and now they can see themselves in it.”

This partnership reflects El Nido Family Centers’ commitment to implementing transformative career and life readiness programs for youth, connecting them to opportunities and pathways to long-term economic mobility as part of its EMERGE STRONG: The Centennial Campaign.

The day also highlighted alternative entry points into the field. Los Angeles Mission College offers short-term biotechnology certifications—some completed in as little as six months through just two courses—that consistently lead to job placement.

The lab was led by Dr. Chander Arora, Biotechnology Program Director at Los Angeles Mission College whose [program boasts a 95% job placement rate](#) with employers such as Takeda and Cedars-Sinai. Her leadership was also instrumental in securing the college’s first Bachelor of Science degree in Biomanufacturing, a milestone for the Los Angeles Community College District. Dr. Arora facilitated the lab day utilizing Amgen Biotech Experience materials presented by Amgen Foundation.

Industry leaders reinforced these connections during the event. Ben Chu, Executive Director at Amgen’s Thousand Oaks site, joined students to share advice and encouragement.

The life sciences sector is a growing industry in Los Angeles County and a pathway to economic mobility for young people. Entry-level roles can start around \$65,000 annually, with industry salaries averaging more than \$94,000 in Los Angeles County. Many of these roles do not require a four-year degree, creating a faster, more accessible route into a stable career.

“We are preparing the next generation of bioscience leaders for high growth careers that will shape the future of health and innovation here in Los Angeles. Through our Sparks program, we are addressing a critical equity gap, as students from under resourced communities are less than half as likely to have access to STEM programs,” stated Dan Witzling, BioscienceLA COO.

Local leadership also joined the event, including Brandon Gonzalez, District Representative from Senator Caroline Menjivar’s office.



While Los Angeles has one of the most diverse life sciences workforces in the country, it does not yet fully reflect the region’s population. Efforts like this help close that gap by expanding pathways to opportunities that have historically been difficult to access for young people growing up in LA’s highest-need communities.

To view and download high-resolution photos from the event, [click here](#).

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**ABOUT EL NIDO FAMILY CENTERS**

Founded in 1925, [El Nido Family Centers](#) is a nonprofit with six sites across Los Angeles County dedicated to creating pathways to stability, opportunity, and wellbeing for youth and families. El Nido serves more than 12,000 Angelenos each year through 12+ no-cost trauma-informed programs focused on mental health, early childhood development, education, housing stability, food access, community building, and career & life readiness. With deep roots in LA’s highest-need neighborhoods, El Nido meets families where they are—at home, in schools, churches, and community centers—to deliver comprehensive direct services across generations.

**ABOUT BIOSCIENCELA**

Bioscience Los Angeles County Inc. ([BioscienceLA](#)) is a nonprofit organization established in 2018 with a mission to create, enable, and promote an enviable, thriving, vibrant, life sciences ecosystem in Greater Los Angeles Area to produce economic and societal benefits in the region.