



**Mark Ridley-Thomas**  
Supervisor, Second District

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## [Fortifying the Pipeline for LA County's Bioscience Workforce](#)



*(Left to Right) Bio-Flex Graduates Emily Soriano, Vera Hutchings, Gabriel Sianez, and Andrea Morando*

Nineteen high school students from Compton Manuel Dominguez High School graduated from the Bio-Flex Pre-apprenticeship program, created to expose and offer high school and college students' hands-on experience at a Bioscience company. The program is a flexible, yet structured career pathway for the next generation of Bioscience workers in LA County. So far, more than 75 students have graduated from the Bio-Flex program after being placed with companies such as Takeda, Oak Crest Institute of Science, Protomer Technologies, and Pasadena Bio Collaborative Incubator.

*Bio-Flex Graduate Vera Hutchings*



“Thank you for giving me this amazing opportunity to be a part of the Bio-Flex program. I see myself working in the forensic science department in the near future and I would like to thank this program for giving me the opportunity to see different types of career choices. My favorite part of the program was getting to meet people from different companies and understanding their stories and seeing how they work.” – Bio-Flex Graduate Vera Hutchings

In 2015, in a motion authored by Supervisor Ridley-Thomas, he directed the County of Los Angeles to study key industries for job growth and economic development. The result was the development of a Countywide Bioscience initiative that included the formation of the Bio-Flex program to create pre-apprenticeship and registered apprenticeship training opportunities for underrepresented communities.

“Bio and life sciences have seen tremendous growth over the past several years, particularly in LA, where the industry outpaced the economy during the last economic slowdown,” said David J. Whelan, Chief Executive Officer of BioscienceLA, the regional innovation catalyst seeded by the Bioscience Initiative. “Today, as we weather both healthcare and economic crises, the industry is poised for significant expansion, which will create numerous new jobs in the LA region, which will in turn require new training and development programs. We are building the future of health innovation today through programs like Bio-Flex.”

In a partnership that includes the South Bay Workforce Investment Board (SBWIB), and the County of Los Angeles Workforce Development, Aging, and Community Services Department (WDACS), El Camino College, West Los Angeles College, the Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation, Cal State Dominguez Hills, BioCom, RxRS Foundation, and Training Funding Partners, this innovative workforce pipeline program has worked to increase diversity in the Bioscience sector by training the next generation for bioscience jobs that include lab coat careers as well as manufacturing careers such as production, equipment and quality control technician.



*Bio-Flex Graduate Gabriel Sianez*

“I am grateful to have been in this Bio-Flex program! If you’re looking to soon be employed, I recommend this program as it strengthened my skills and confidence! This program has opened up my eyes even more in this field which I seek to pursue.” – Bio-Flex Graduate Gabriel Sianez

The Compton cohort of Bio-Flex students from Manuel Dominguez High School represent the most diverse class yet to graduate from this program. The graduating class was composed of all students of color, which included seventeen females and two males. They were exposed to employer-approved online training courses providing skills needed to succeed in the life science field. This year’s student program concluded with a virtual career day featuring a remote tour of the new BioLabs at The Lundquist Institute, along with a discussion

on career pathways and a tour from the PolyPeptide Group, a company that manufactures and develops peptide active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) in Torrance.

The Compton High School teacher who leads the class, Dr. Olushina Oshinuga, said “The students who participated and completed the Bio-Flex program saw the great opportunity presented, and they were not afraid to go after it. They were determined to succeed.”



*Bio-Flex Graduate Andrea Morando*

“I want to thank Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas and the South Bay Workforce Investment Board for giving me the opportunity to be a part of the Bio-Flex Program. My knowledge has increased so much day by day, especially helping me be prepared for an actual job interview. I had so much fun and gained greater knowledge. Thank you.” – Bio-Flex Graduate Andrea Morando

Recently, SBWIB received approval from the United States Department of Labor to register two apprenticeship occupations, Bio-Manufacturing/Production Technician and Biomedical Equipment Technician. A Bio-Manufacturing/Production Technician or Assistant works in the lab and adheres to standard operating procedures to safely mix, inspect, and test bio-medical goods. The Biomedical Equipment Technician inspects and tests malfunctioning medical or related equipment, following manufacturers’ specifications and using test and analysis instruments.

The apprenticeships have been approved for ages as young as 17 years old. It will be up to the bioscience employer to decide what age to hire but creating an apprenticeship that allows youth to become an apprentice is a unique and innovative feature of these non-traditional apprenticeship models. SBWIB engaged several employers who are participating in the Bio-Flex program and have helped to craft the design of the training plans. One of these employers includes Bachem Americas, a company that manufactures API’s as well as innovative biochemicals for research purposes. Bachem has expressed interest in taking on an apprentice along with many other employers such as Thermo Fisher Scientific, Freudenberg Medical, Sakura, Takeda, Oak Crest Institute, Protomer Technologies and Pasadena Bio Collaborative Incubator.

“It has been a pleasure to work with the Office of Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas to set up the Bio-Flex program. These new apprenticeship models will provide so many fantastic career opportunities for young people throughout our community for years to come,” said Jan Vogel, SBWIB Executive Director.

Youth interested in an exciting bioscience career should visit the Bio-Flex website <https://www.sbwib.org/bioflex> for more information and apply for an apprenticeship using the South Bay WIB’s [resume portal](#).