

# PREPARING FOR THE BIOTECH DECADE

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# STEM Pathways Begin in East LA

Panelists share advice and personal insights into the road leading to a career in biotechnology

By Pamela Madrid



Felipe Hernandez, a first generation college student at USC, talks to high school students and their parents about his path to studying civil engineering.

## What are the keys to become part of the biotechnology evolution?

Panelists representing USC, East Los Angeles College (ELAC), and Theodore Roosevelt High School addressed curious middle and high school students, and their parents, with information about rewarding careers related to biotech, medical discovery and technology, and the academic careers that begin with strong foundations in math and science. “It’s exciting to be in the lab working on experiments that could help bring change to the world,” said Valerie Beltran, a middle school student enrolled in USC Neighborhood Academic Initiative program. As Valerie and the other 200 parents and students at the “Full STEM Ahead” workshop learned, taking the right courses is just the beginning.

## Find a Mentor

First generation college students often feel isolated and unequipped for college, largely because their parents aren’t able to provide first-hand advice. As a result, many of these students feel like they don’t belong and are reluctant to seek help from faculty and staff.

“Many times, we make the mistake of looking for mentors that look like us. Mentors come in many colors and sizes. Never think they have to look like you, to help you,” said **Armando M. Rivera**, dean of STEM and professor of chemistry, East Los Angeles College. “As long as they take a genuine interest in you, they can help.”

## Expect to Work Hard

For panelist and college student Felipe Hernandez, it’s become part of his routine to study until 3 a.m., and still be required to be in class the next morning at 8 a.m. As a USC civil engineering student, and Norman Topping Scholar, the hunger to learn and work towards a brighter future helps him overcome obstacles. “When I was twelve years old, I started helping my parents sell cut fruit on the street to make ends meet. One day we only sold \$28 worth, and \$4 of that was in food stamps so we had very little profit,” shared Hernandez. “The memory of that day motivates me to work and study harder.”

## Parental Involvement is Vital

From leveraging technology to regularly communicate with teachers, to easing any barriers to learning, the parent’s role in the educational journey is vital, especially as students advance in their coursework.

“Parents need to be in partnership with the school and support what is being done in the classroom. By working together, parents can supplement the efforts of the school,” said **Raul Mata**, college and career advisor at Theodore Roosevelt High School. “Parents should also seek out the academic and emotional support resources that schools offer to ensure their children are accessing the help they need to succeed.”