

**Remarks by Joseph I. Castro
President, California State University, Fresno
California Master Plan for Higher Education Hearing
Sacramento, CA
August 31, 2017**

Thank you Chair Berman and members of the committee. And thank you to my higher education colleagues and fellow panelists.

Chancellor White intended to be here today, but unfortunately was injured over the weekend – he is okay, but not able to travel for a few days. In the meantime, it is my honor to represent the California State University on his behalf.

For those who may not know my story, I was born and raised in the small city of Hanford... in the San Joaquin Valley. I am the grandson of farmworkers who immigrated from Mexico about 100 years ago. My great grandfather helped to build the Santa Fe Railroad. Like so many attending California's colleges and universities, I was the first in my family to earn a bachelor's degree.

My public university education and UC Berkeley and Stanford University degrees altered the trajectory of my life and gives me the opportunity to realize my potential... it set me on the path that eventually led me back home... to California State University, Fresno as its 8th president.

I also like to tell Chancellor White's story... *and not just because he attended Fresno State...* but because his story demonstrates how a first-generation immigrant in this state can rise to the top of his field through hard work and the opportunities provided at the community colleges, California State University and University of California.

Countless California success stories are being written today as hundreds of thousands of community college, CSU and UC students – *many the very first in their families to set foot on a college or university campus* – create their own path... and in the process help strengthen the state's economy. They are the next generation of leaders for California.

That we have so many first-generation students is amazing... and remarkable...it affirms our philosophy that talent exists in every household regardless of income...it is also something that we have come to expect in California... a literal first-in-class public higher education system.

And we have enhanced that public system by working closely with California's extraordinary independent colleges and universities... powerhouses of research and knowledge-creation like USC and Stanford.

That is the consequence of the California Master Plan for Higher Education adopted five decades ago.

It is important to ground these conversations – conversations that can get very abstract – with the immediate human consequences. The people in this room would not be here without their California higher education... nor would the millions of students and alumni who have their own California higher education success story.

So... this is what the Master Plan got right... the Master Plan created a dynamic, high-quality system with multiple points of entry, serving a great variety of student needs.

The differentiation between our systems means that we can each tailor our academic program offerings to our particular cohorts of students... this also means that the *wrap-around* services we provide can be targeted to provide – *as Chancellor White likes to say* – individualized education at scale.

The CSU understands and embraces our role within the higher education framework. We know that California faces a drought of 1 million bachelor's degrees by 2025... and the CSU has a plan – through Graduation Initiative 2025 – that will help more students graduate... with high-quality degrees... sooner...

And this will help alleviate that bachelor's-degree drought.

Indeed, the CSU is well placed to address at least half that drought... but we need a more robust commitment from the state – and we need to have an honest conversation about steady enrollment growth... something I will return to later.

Back to what we are doing right...

As you may know, half the teachers in the state earn their credentials through the CSU. That has long been a point of pride for our system. In fact, Fresno State prepares more teachers than any public university in California.

But, not as well known, more than half of all California's bachelor's degrees in agriculture, public administration, engineering, criminal justice and business are earned at the CSU.

And on occasion – as with our highly-regarded Education, Nursing and Physical Therapy programs – we have stepped in to offer applied doctorate degrees in high need areas where there is a clearly demonstrated workforce need.

The impact of the CSU is magnified by the fact that we serve a student population that resembles California. In fact, two-thirds of bachelor's degrees earned by Latinos or Latinas in this state are earned at the CSU... **two-thirds!**

The CSU system... like our state... has no ethnic or racial majority... and the largest plurality, again, is among Latino and Latina students.

And the CSU – through Graduation Initiative 2025 – has committed to closing racial, ethnic and economic achievement gaps.

The CSU serves California's communities... and we serve them well.

That is our mission, our privilege and our source of pride. It is also our responsibility – and accordingly we have set goals, *including those contained in Graduation Initiative 2025*, to contribute to the state's needs while examining our policies and processes to identify how we can continuously improve.

Yes, the California Master Plan for Higher Education has served our state well. However, planners 50 years ago did not anticipate two things:

- Partnerships and collaborations across the education continuum
- And the rising demand for higher education

Starting with partnerships...

With generous support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and others, Fresno State has made unprecedented progress in building partnerships across educational sectors to plan an improved K-16 college pipeline, now called the Central Valley Promise. The Promise is an intentioned response to the relatively low college-going rate in the Central Valley of California with the first phase in Fresno County. Fresno State, together with K-12 and community college partners, has capitalized on shared initiatives in instructional technology to design a multifaceted plan to increase college-completion rates in the region.

The Central Valley Promise is a community-wide effort to promote college as a viable option for youth in the region. The Promise ensures that if children and their parents pledge to do what it takes in middle and high school to prepare, college will be there for them in the future, guaranteed. In addition, the first semester at a community college will be free.

Significantly enhancing the college-going culture and improving the college-completion rate in the Central Valley will fundamentally change the notion of educational equity in our traditionally underserved region.

And Fresno is not alone.

17 CSU campuses have built admissions-related partnerships with community colleges or high schools, many under the name College Promise.

These programs are not exactly alike... each campus works with its local community – school districts, community colleges, University of California, private non-profit colleges, cities and employers – to figure out the right mix of ***rigorous standards, expanded opportunities and individualized support.***

CSU campuses are natural regional players – given our number and distribution throughout the state... and the fact that CSU often serves place-bound students, who learn, live, work and raise families in their local communities.

We even have one of the top high schools in California co-located at Fresno State... as well as high schools at Cal State Dominguez Hills, Los Angeles and Pomona.

We are also doing critical work on the statewide, system-to-system level.

The community college system is a critical access point to higher education... as it is open to all California high school graduates. And community colleges are a critical partner for the CSU... in fact, more than a third of our undergraduates are transfer students who are now pursuing their bachelor's. At Fresno State 36% of new students in Fall 2017 are community college transfer students.

Recognizing the significant number of community college students we receive, the CSU has worked together with the California Community Colleges to develop Associate Degree for Transfer agreements.

ADT programs are shining examples of working across segments to provide clear pipelines for students to earn degrees in 120 units, while completing their university degree in a seamless and timely way.

So regional and system-to-system partnerships are critical... but creating pipelines only make sense if those pipelines lead to a degree and a career.

You heard from the Analysts office... and the CSU openly acknowledges... that more than one third of California's graduating high school students are ready and eligible to start at one of our campuses.

The eligibility study's findings that 41% of high school graduates are fully eligible for CSU admission is something that should be celebrated. It means that more and more of our students are academically preparing themselves to attend college.

But it also raises the questions about serving these first-time freshmen students, while still offering robust pathways for transfer students.

There are two ways to respond to this... *first*, the CSU could become more selective – changing the profile of the students we serve... or *second*, we as a state can revise our five-decade old ideas about who should go to college and earn a bachelor's degree.

I think there is much to commend the idea that a better-educated citizenry is in California's economic and social best interests.

Ultimately, as legislators, you are in a position to determine whether we can fund a plan that would support California higher education... California economic mobility... and California social progress... into the next 50 years.

Fresno State and the CSU will keep doing our part...

We are finding better ways to address entering students' skills gaps... ways that don't involve zero-credit remedial or developmental education.

We are moving away from make-it-or-break-it placement exams... and taking a more expansive view of students' skills and qualifications.

We are leveraging technology to help guide and track students throughout their academic careers... and gleaning information from these systems to inform decision-making... identifying strategies to invest limited resources for the maximum benefit.

Finally, we are addressing administrative and financial burdens that may impede student success... and will continue to foster a sense of belonging on campus for all students.

So... with your help – *including robust funding for enrollment, facilities and student services* – I am certain we will give today's and tomorrow's students the opportunity to fully utilize their extraordinary talents and to fulfill their dreams as California's next generation of leaders.

Thank you again for convening this hearing.