

REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

Sept. 26, 2023

President Ellen Neufeldt

Remarks as prepared

Thank you, Ernest, and thank you, Sara!

And good morning!

It's so meaningful to see this room filled with so many who share an unwavering love for CSUSM and are united with us in our profound mission of student success.

I just want to take a moment to thank all the people who so tirelessly worked to make this event possible.

From our event planners ...

To our staff and leaders in Community Engagement and University Advancement ...

To our creative team in University Communications ...

And our custodial, parking, public safety and facilities teams for ensuring our campus is always on-point and welcoming ...

You all make it look so easy and I know it is not by any stretch.

And one more person I'd like to thank Dr. Glen Brodowsky – our Academic Senate chair.

Let me give you all a round of applause.

It's been one year since I stood on this stage at Report to the Community to unveil our new strategic plan, The Power of CSUSM, The Power of Us.

At that time, I shared that our mission was singularly focused on two words that mean so much: student success.

And I also proclaimed our bold vision to become a top university in the nation for social mobility.

Well, little did I know that by November, we would be ranked the No. 1 university on CollegeNet's Social Mobility Index, outranking 1,400 other universities!

That's right!

That No. 1 ranking was a wonderful surprise and speaks to who we are as a university – building upon the legacy of the last 34 years.

Together, we are sending a strong message to every student that their potential knows no bounds. And their journey with us is about education and using that education for empowerment and opportunity.

Let me be clear – we don't do it for the accolades. We do it for our students, their families and communities, and the industries who will benefit from the knowledge and skills imparted to our graduates, tomorrow's leaders, innovators and changemakers, shaping our world for the better.

That's how we define social mobility – and for us, that's what our work – together – is all about.

If you read the headlines right now – there's a confluence of challenges looming over higher education and our world.

Nationally, college enrollment is on the decline, and doubts about the value of a college education are casting a long shadow.

But guess what?

Right here at CSUSM, we're not walking the well-worn path; we're boldly carving a new one.

This fall, we experienced a surge of interest from prospective first-time students receiving nearly 20,000 applications – a 50% increase from our previous high, five years ago.

If you have a chance to take a walk across campus today, you'll feel the energy thanks to our largest first-year class in campus history!

In an era when it's so hard to find a sense of belonging on a college campus, our university was recently recognized as the 12th best in the country for student experience by the Wall Street Journal.

This ranking reflects the perceptions of students and alumni related to aspects of student life including learning opportunities, career preparation, diversity and facilities.

Moreover, in a world that sometimes questions the value of a college degree, we only need to look at the success of our students for validation.

Just a few months ago, I had the immense privilege of shaking hands with 4,200 extraordinary graduates at commencement, my favorite day of the year.

They epitomize what social mobility is all about.

A remarkable 57% of them were the first in their families to earn a four-year degree.

And 52% come from family households with a median income of less than \$60,000 per year.

Almost half our students have their tuition fully covered, thanks to federal and state funding, as well as the private scholarships and paid internships many of you provide.

Thank you for making such a difference.

According to recent data, when our students graduate, their median potential salary is an impressive \$85,000.

And for many of them, like Miguel Molina, a first-generation/low-income student who graduated in May with honors as part of our first class of electrical engineering majors – they cross the commencement stage with not one but – in his case – three job offers in hand.

In July, he started his journey as an electronics engineer at Lockheed Martin.

That's social mobility!

Beyond career success and economic gains, it's personal impact that truly matters.

Each graduate's journey creates a ripple effect that touches not just their own lives, but also the lives of their families and entire communities.

That's what higher education should be about rather than what it traditionally has represented: preserving prestige with admissions centering on selectivity, wealth and maintaining the status quo.

Well, not here at Cal State San Marcos.

For us, we are rising to the call to innovate and meet tomorrow's challenges head on supporting our students so that they can transcend the barriers their parents and grandparents have faced.

And because of them and because of all of you, I stand here as the president of the No. 1 university in the nation for social mobility.

It's not something I take credit for individually, because this has always been about the Power of Us, working together to ensure we are a university leading the way for what higher education should and must become.

This summer, I was invited to attend a Biden/Harris Administration National Summit on Higher Education in Washington, D.C.

It was such an honor for me to be there representing not only CSUSM but the CSU.

Discussions centered on looking to the future and how higher education, collectively, could ensure that the opportunities for a college degree are opportunities for all.

At the summit, I was one of only two invited leaders representing regional public universities, which are so often left out of the higher ed conversation.

I was proud to talk about the best practices we've established and modeled right here; and it became clear to me that CSUSM's reputation was already known to many.

For example, when I met Carrie Billy, the president and CEO of American Indian Higher Ed Consortium, she spoke so highly of Dr. Joely Proudfit, chair of our American Indian Studies Department and director of our California Indian Culture and Sovereignty Center.

Dr. Proudfit is set to release the latest "State of American Indian/ Alaska Native Education in California" report, which builds upon her ongoing work to create a 21st-century model to recruit, serve and graduate American Indian students in higher education.

I also had the pleasure of meeting Deputy Secretary Cindy Marten and she let me know how much she admired the San Marcos Writing Project and the efforts of Dr. Laurie Stowell and the School of Ed to provide teacher professional development.

This summer, the San Marcos Writing Project hosted a symposium on artificial intelligence in the classroom – a topic that is relevant to all educators.

Whether in the halls of D.C., the chambers of Sacramento, or right here in our region, I love talking about Cal State San Marcos and our unwavering commitment to social mobility – not

only as a moral and ethical imperative, but an economic and workforce pipeline necessary for our region, state and nation.

Someone who needs no convincing of the role of higher education in social mobility is Dr. Millie García, who will be stepping into the historic leadership role next week as the first-ever Latina CSU chancellor.

And we are so excited to welcome her to our campus next week for our third annual national Social Mobility Symposium along with officials and leaders from the governor's office, the White House, the U.S. Department of Education and 100 other different organizations.

Preceding our national symposium, next Wednesday, our College of Education, Health & Human Services is partnering with the Burnham Center for Community Advancement on a regional Behavioral and Mental Health Symposium.

This event will delve into collaborative approaches we can take to build a sustainable pipeline of skilled mental and behavioral health professionals.

Huge thanks to Dean Jennifer Ostergren for her leadership along with our other partners including the County of San Diego, TrueCare, North City, the CSU Shiley Haynes Institute for Palliative Care – and of course, our very own San Marcos Mayor, Rebecca Jones!

The pandemic has created an urgent need for innovation in developing the behavioral and mental health workforce – and we stand ready to lead the way.

In fact, we are working on a proposal to introduce new accelerated and dual enrollment pathways so that students as young as high school can complete credits toward degrees.

But we can't do it alone – we need philanthropic support to make it happen on an urgent timeline.

We're in discussions with potential funders now emphasizing that in the arc of just a three-year-time-to-degree we could graduate hundreds of highly qualified health, wellness and education professionals.

We're already graduating about 260 new nurses each year – we are the highest producer of nursing talent in the CSU and the fourth highest in California.

And we are preparing students for other high-demand careers in data science, wildfire science, information security, public health, the arts, education and other fields where we have connected our academic programs to industry needs.

Our dedication to social mobility and preparing tomorrow's workforce is vital to securing the long-term resilience of our local economy.

The San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation's "Inclusive Economic Growth" initiative underscores the need to ensure that every one of all backgrounds has access to rewarding careers in thriving industries.

Achieving this goal requires an innovative educational approach, one that engages partners across the entire K-16 educational spectrum.

You may already be familiar with our flagship program, “The Alliance,” which has pioneered success pathways for K-12 students.

And I'm proud to share that in the past year, we've added five more district partners, bringing the total number to 15.

Moving forward, it's our vision to expand the Alliance to every school district in our region – including Imperial County – while also incorporating new living/learning communities to enhance their belonging and success.

The Alliance provides clarity to students on the how of getting to college and also the why.

And our data shows that Alliance students arrive better prepared for college classes and graduate at higher rates than other students.

I'm so grateful we have here today:

- Dr. Ben Churchill, superintendent of Carlsbad Unified;
- Dr. Andy Johnsen, superintendent of San Marcos Unified; and
- Kevin Humphrey, superintendent of Guajome Schools.

Thank you for your leadership and partnership.

And, as you heard earlier during the presentation of our Community Partner of the Year award – our three community college leaders not only talk the talk but walk the walk when it comes to creating programs that facilitate timely, affordable pathways from associates to bachelor's degrees.

Let's give another round of applause to:

- Dr. Sunny Cooke.
- Dr. Star Rivera-Lacy,
- and Dr. Roger Shultz,

They are leaders in raising the educational attainment of our region. And I also want to mention another recently retired community college leader who is with us today, Dr. Pamela Luster of San Diego Mesa College.

Thank you for being here with the San Diego Foundation.

Also, here at CSUSM, our Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Dr. Dawn Formo, is leading a new half-a-million-dollar grant from the College Futures Foundation and the CSU.

Working with 14 CSU campuses and community colleges across our state, we are striving to collectively improve the community college-to-university pipeline.

This work has the potential to serve as a model not only within our state, but nationally as well.

It is through collaborations and friendships like these that we forge strong connections and enhance educational opportunities for our students.

That's the way to social mobility and that's the Power of Us.

And when we talk about the rich diversity of our students – 70% of them are students of color, 52% first-generation, nearly half of them low-income and 40% over the age of 22.

I also want to talk about how 1 in 9 is military affiliated – the highest per capita in the CSU.

Rooted here in one of the largest military hubs in the nation, we have proudly and consistently ranked as a "Best for Vets" campus for years, thanks in large part to our beautiful Epstein Family Veterans Center.

Thank you, Dan and Phyllis Epstein, for supporting this and so much more at our university.

With our new Military Roundtable advisory group, we are bringing even more enhanced focus to how we serve those who have served our country.

One recent outcome: we are excited to partner with Camp Pendleton to bring academic programs to base including cybersecurity, supply chain management and nursing.

And we're happy to have with us this morning, Timothy Crisp, who has been partnering with us on this every step of the way.

And another exciting development:

You've heard me say that we want to raise funds for a new senior director of military relations position.

Thanks to a philanthropic seed gift from Ingo Hentschel and Cox Communications we are making progress.

And Maj. Gen. Tony Jackson has also been at the forefront of this work – an incredible advocate for our region's veterans and military community.

And I also want to thank retired Marine Colonel Jim Gruny who has been such an astute adviser, facilitating connections and conversations that have helped us move this forward.

I see he has a full table this morning – thank you all for being here – we are grateful for your service!

As we work together to create programs and pathways for the diverse and talented students of our region, I am excited for the possibilities that abound for our engineering program.

This year's electrical engineering capstone included four projects sponsored by the Marine Corps Tactical System Support Activity Group based at Camp Pendleton.

One of those projects was focused on making fully autonomous drones and another looked at developing a reliable long-range communication device for military or maritime applications.

Thanks to the generous support of Viasat, Hunter Industries, Nordson Corporation and other visionary contributors, our engineering program is thriving.

Joining electrical and software engineering, our computer engineering program started this fall!

I want to highlight an exceptional advocate for our programs: Simon Kuo, vice president of quality at Viasat who constantly advocates and fundraises.

Today our engineering program is one of the most diverse in the nation. Last year, over 30% of our software engineering majors were military connected.

And 50% of our 400 total engineering majors were Latinx.

The national average? Only 9%.

This diversity is key to unlocking opportunities to well-paying careers for those who have previously not had the opportunity.

And on the horizon, our Integrated Science and Engineering Building will allow us to grow engineering to nearly 2,000 majors, meeting not only CSU enrollment goals but California workforce goals in STEM.

This building is the only academic facility on the CSU's priority building list - and it will take us to an entirely different level in the next phase of who we are.

With facilities that support disciplines across our university, we will be able to partner with leaders right here in Southern California related to biotech, the life sciences and green chemistry.

Bringing a building like this to reality ensures that our students have the flexible lab and classroom space to innovate and prepare for the new and rapidly changing science and technology needs of our region.

For example, this summer, CSTEM offered a four-week experience to introduce students to quantum mechanics and the emerging field of quantum information science and technology.

This opportunity introduced them to the unique properties of quantum mechanics to create more powerful and efficient microchips.

Already, we have our first industry donor for the building, Nordson.

Thank you to Sara Vaz, Nordson's community relations manager and chair of our University Council, for her leadership and advocacy.

And by the way there's an opportunity for every one of you to be a part of this project – and the time is now!

Our Integrated Science and Engineering Building is just one way we are growing our innovation ecosystem across disciplines.

Established just two years ago with the support of the Conrad Prebys Foundation, our Innovation Hub has quickly become a dynamic conduit for entrepreneurial endeavors that unite our students, faculty and community.

What sets our hub apart is how it supports innovation at the intersection of social mobility and social entrepreneurship.

A standout initiative is our Faculty Innovation Fellows where faculty members lead entrepreneurial projects and serve as innovation ambassadors.

For instance, Nursing Lecturer Matt Mincy, recently forged a partnership with TrueCare.

Together, they are creating a mobile health unit that sends health science students into the community.

With additional funding from the Conrad Prebys Foundation, this venture offers students the unique opportunity to collaborate across our health disciplines to deliver wellness services to medically underserved areas in our region.

A heartfelt thanks to Michelle Gonzalez, president and CEO of TrueCare – and a CSUSM alumna – for her support!

Another example, Dr. Rebecca Perren, professor of marketing and a new faculty fellow, is now pioneering a student-run marketing agency that will offer complimentary services to regional nonprofits and entrepreneurs.

Matt and Rebecca's work exemplifies our commitment to engagement through teaching, research, service and partnership, a hallmark of our campus since our founding.

We were one of the first universities in the nation to earn the Carnegie Foundation's Community Engagement designation in 2008.

Driving this forward is our University Library, with archivist Jennifer Ho, who is embarking on a listening tour to establish community-led priorities for our historical archives.

Expanding this work, Greg Koch, co-founder of Stone Brewing, and the Ecke family have provided foundational support for the expansion of our Library's special collections to document our region's history. Matt, Rebecca and Jennifer are just a few examples of the innovative work of our faculty.

And if you want to learn more, Scott Gross, our associate vice president of industry partnerships, who organizes our Faculty Innovation Fellow program, invites you all to learn more at our inaugural Innovation Showcase on Nov. 16.

The Innovation Hub also champions student entrepreneurship. For example, 2022 business administration graduate Rachel Lafenhagen, first found her entrepreneurial footing through the Hub.

In May, she secured second place in the Social Enterprise category at the CSU Startup Launch Competition with "Craft-Your-Bra," a customizable modular brassiere system, inspired by her grandmother, a breast cancer survivor.

What I love is that Rachel's vision isn't just about fashion and monetary gain, it is about social entrepreneurship and helping breast cancer survivors feel confident in their own skin.

The fact that Rachel was able to launch a business, garner investor interest, and form an advisory board all while in college epitomizes our commitment to social mobility – a testament to the Power of Us.

As a young university looking ahead to the next 30 years, we know that our campus is not yet fully built out.

I mentioned already our plans for our future Integrated Science & Engineering Building, but that's not the only one we are planning for!

You might recall that last fall we opened North Commons, a 300-bed residence hall bringing traditional first-year housing to our campus for the first time along with our very first dining hall. So much more is on the horizon.

With growing enrollment and to ensure that the rising cost of living isn't a barrier to student success, we will be breaking ground this winter on our new University Village Housing complex, partially funded via \$91 million from the state.

This project, which includes space for an additional 550 residents along with a dining hall, will be move-in ready for fall of 2026.

And that's not all – via another partnership with North City, we'll add 500 more new beds – bringing our total number of beds to nearly 3,000.

No longer a purely commuter campus, these new projects will have a profound impact on student life and belonging, academic achievement and student success.

This is how a city, a university and a private partner work together to plan smart communities!

But that's not all!

Another facility – in the very early stages of planning – is being championed by our student government leaders, including Ernest Cisneros!

Our vision is to build a Recreation and Wellness Facility that will offer dynamic and inclusive recreation via fitness and wellness programming and the promotion of healthy lifestyles.

This project would mark yet another significant stride in the future of our university.

All this physical expansion – from an Integrated Science & Engineering Building, to new housing, to a recreation and wellness facility – serve our vision of enhancing the student experience, enriching our region and sparking innovation.

And it is the embodiment of the Power of Us in action.

Over the last 34 years, we have evolved from an innovative start-up into a beacon of learning and progress with so much momentum lifting our wings.

Often, our work has required a determination to push boundaries even in the face of conventional expectations or naysayers who said it couldn't or wouldn't be done.

Our student-athletes know what it's like to be the underdog, to come from behind and shatter expectations.

But something you need to know is that we aren't only No. 1 in social mobility... our Cougars are No. 1 in our athletic conference – taking home the CCAA Commissioner's Cup for the first time in campus history this June!

We're still feeling the glow of our women's basketball team going all the way to the Sweet 16, while our men's team made it to their second straight NCAA West Regional Tournament.

Men's and women's golf brought home two conference championships.

Men's and women's track and field teams competed in nationals.

And softball made it all the way to the National Championship Women's College World Series!

Even better, a record 103 student athletes earned Academic Achievement Awards from the D2 Athletics Directors Association – the highest in our conference!

Our students are clearly powerhouses in competition and in the classroom – and that's the Power of Us!

You know, a winning culture doesn't just happen.

It requires leadership and resilience ... as well as that special spark that says: Just watch us!

For example, in a year marked by a 10% decrease in charitable giving nationwide, we experienced a record-breaking year of philanthropic giving with:

Over \$12 million was raised in total over the last fiscal year, surpassing all previous records.

That includes \$1 million raised in a single evening at our Blue & Silver Dinner in June – the highest amount raised at a giving event in campus history.

And, over half a million dollars raised in 24 hours on Giving Day – our most successful Giving Day ever and top three in our system.

We did this together – with a 23% increase in total donors.

A huge thanks to our amazing Foundation Board who are leading our efforts and setting new records.

That's the Power of Us!

And our faculty and staff aren't backing down either.

For many in academia, research suffered during the pandemic.

But we seized opportunities to innovate resulting in a record-breaking year for external grants! That's right!

This fiscal year, our researchers secured \$25 million dollars in grants, surpassing our previous high of \$18 million five years ago.

Not only that but our faculty continues to shine in various fields.

Jason Magabo Perez, professor of ethnic studies, was appointed the poet laureate of the City of San Diego and communication professor Dr. Gloria Pindi, won a national award for her publication, pushing forward new boundaries of knowledge.

And Dr. Bianca Mothé was recently honored by our system for her exceptional mentorship of underrepresented students in the sciences.

One of her mentees, Sergio Ita, a Marine veteran and first-generation transfer student credits her guidance for his journey to earning a Ph.D. in virology from Harvard leading to his career today as a principal investigator at ThermoFisher Scientific.

By the way, I'm thrilled to share that ThermoFisher Scientific Corporate has endorsed CSUSM as an official university partner campus!

This strategic partnership, endorsed by their Carlsbad campus, signals a formal commitment to enhancing and expanding our current collaborations helping our students move successfully from academia to industry across all our STEM fields.

Empowering our students to thrive in in-demand careers, that's social mobility!

So, let me recap:

We are proudly ranked No. 1 in social mobility.

Our scholar-athletes are smashing records.

We're achieving groundbreaking milestones in giving and research.

And all of this is unlocking the incredible potential of our students, powering careers that transform our workforce and uplift families and communities.

That's not happenstance ... that's the power of us!

As I think about all that we are accomplishing, especially in the realm of student success and social mobility, I'm excited for the boundless promise that lies ahead.

While commencement is my favorite day of the year, there's another day that holds a special place in my heart – New Student and Families Convocation.

This event marks the beginning of the academic journey for our incoming students, a day when we not only welcome them to their new academic home, but also reassure them that they are not alone on this path.

At student convocation, a truly magical moment occurs during the presentation of the CSUSM challenge coin.

This small but meaningful token symbolizes each student's goal to earn their degree.

We invite the loved ones of our students – their parents, spouses, friends – to be a part of this moment, offering the coin along with hopes and dreams for their success.

Having attended many student convocations throughout my career, I can genuinely say that ours is the most meaningful.

Hopes, dreams and vision for the future I share this story of our challenge coin, because you are part of our hopes and dreams, as we strive to realize our shared vision for Cal State San Marcos.

Together, we will support every student on their journey to graduation day ...

We will make bold moves and reach new heights to engage in solutions for our future ...

And we will do this through the Power of Us.

You see, this isn't just my vision – it's our vision ...

to lead the nation in social mobility,

to ignite intellectual engagement,

to champion innovation and inclusion,
to foster sustainability,
to educate the leaders and changemakers of tomorrow,
And to transform lives, families and communities.
That's who we are.
That's the path we are boldly walking.
And that, my friends,
is precisely what we will do – all through the magnificent Power of Us.
That's the Power of CSUSM.