

Report to the Community

President Ellen Neufeldt

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Remarks as prepared

Thank you, Scotty, and thank you, Julia.

Since fall classes started about a month ago, I have seen you everywhere!

I just got to spend the evening with Julia and Earnest, another of our outstanding ASI leaders, on Monday evening.

We also have new campus leaders with us – including College of Business Administration Dean Ron Ramirez and College of Humanities, Arts, Behavioral and Social Sciences Dean Liora Gubkin.

I'm so happy to have President Emerita Karen Haynes and former First Gentleman and Founding Director of ACE Scholars Services Jim Mickelson with us.

We have so much energy on campus – I love seeing our student life back!

It is a testament to the spirit of CSUSM that even despite the challenges of these past few years, we haven't let our dreams dampen.

We are a university that dares to hope, and we are committed to bold action.

Thanks to you – and in partnership with so many – we are poised to reach new heights.

Let me share with you a few examples: Last year, our faculty received nearly 60 research awards totaling \$14 million.

And in the last two years, total private giving has reached almost \$12 million.

Meanwhile, our athletics program roared back after an 18-month pandemic pause – to showcase the best collective performance in campus history.

Softball and women's basketball won regular season titles. Women's golf and men's basketball each won their tournament championships.

And our Cougars finished second in the standings in our conference.

Not only that, our institutional reputation is on the rise: This spring, we ranked in the top 40 of universities nationally – and first in our region – in the Economic Mobility Index, which measures universities on student outcomes and economic mobility.

And we're in the top 2% in the nation on Collegenet's Social Mobility Index.

And, one of the most meaningful measures of our success: This spring we graduated 4,400 students, bringing our total alumni to nearly 60,000.

With 80% of them remaining right here in our region – from the Southern Border of San Diego to Orange and Riverside counties – there is no question, CSUSM is your university, fueling inclusive economic growth and serving as agents of tremendous positive change.

Now, as we emerge from the stormy sea of COVID and look to what the future holds for Cal State San Marcos and our region, I am so excited to report that our spirit is strong. Our vision is focused!

And I couldn't be more excited to lead this great university.

Guiding our work is our most audacious idea yet: to become a national leader of social mobility, transforming lives, families and communities.

This idea is the heart of our new strategic plan – The Power of CSUSM/The Power of Us.

The plan is our road map for turning our ideas and aspirations into reality.

Distilled to its core, it calls on us to attract and empower diverse students to be tomorrow's socially just leaders, taking advantage of our strengths and location to foster an environment where ideas can thrive transforming our region, and our world.

This bold vision builds on the great legacy of the past 33 years, and the leadership of our former three presidents – a legacy I'm proud to carry on and build upon with our faculty, staff, students and you.

With great appreciation of where we've come and those who have built CSUSM to where it is today, along with the ongoing friendship of our region's leaders and generous supporters, we are ready – through The Power of Us – to capitalize on this historic moment.

Together we will magnify opportunities for our amazing students who never stop inspiring us.

And by doing so we will further transform lives and communities across Southern California.

Collectively – via The Power of Us – we are declaring right here, and right now, that Cal State San Marcos will become a national leader of social mobility, a first-choice university for first-generation students and future generations of students.

And we will do this as we drive intellectual engagement, innovation and sustainability for a diverse, global society.

The measure of our success will be the success of our students and the impact they make after graduation.

With the exemplary education they receive here, they won't just be leaders but changemakers.

I've shared before my passion for student success.

It's been at the center of my life's work in higher education – starting from those early days at University Tennessee at Chattanooga, where I first met and was mentored by CSUSM's first president Dr. Bill Stacy, to my time at Old Dominion where I co-founded a National Center for Social Mobility.

And now at CSUSM, we're building upon the university's reputation as an escalator of student social mobility.

I truly believe that there is no greater place that unites such a diverse and talented population in common pursuit of knowledge, creativity and impact.

At a time when the value of higher education is being called into question, and when most universities are measuring prestige based on who they keep out rather than who they accept, Cal State San Marcos stands out as a beacon of hope and opportunity.

A place where our simple yet profound mission of student success serves as a distinguished example of how students not only transcend generational barriers but unlock their full potential.

The goal of our work is more than just financial rewards or workforce readiness.

It's about what our students do upon graduation – how they lead and give back in their communities.

Together, we strive to equip students to be lifelong learners – scientists, engineers, teachers, healthcare providers, business professionals, nonprofit leaders, and artists who can use an array of creative, critical and strategic methods to collaborate and solve problems whenever – and wherever – they face them.

This is not only an economic imperative but a social one.

The benefits of a CSUSM education aim to support mental and physical health while promoting civic involvement, a healthy democracy and a robust innovation ecosystem.

To prepare the students of tomorrow for the challenges that face us all, we've long worked with our K-12 partners.

In fact, faculty in our School of Education just received a \$3 million U.S. Department of Education award to support K-12 teachers in our region.

This effort will not only support early literacy for English learners via professional development for teachers, but it will also help parents and families in their efforts to support their children as they build rich language skills.

And our well-known Alliance program is creating a regional college-going culture via nearly a dozen MOUs with school districts.

I'm grateful some of our K-12 regional leaders are here today including:

- Dr. Ben Churchill, superintendent of the Carlsbad Unified School District;
- And Ilsa Garza-Gonzalez, superintendent of the Fallbrook Union High School District; and
- Cameron Curry, CEO of The Classical Academies;

In February, we expanded the Alliance by signing an MOU with the Coalition on Black and African American Education – a group of about a dozen leaders that serve and are a part of our regional Black and African American community.

This Alliance is one of the outcomes of our Black Student Success Initiative, which launched in 2021.

I want to thank everyone who was key in forming this partnership.

We are now moving it beyond simply a signed agreement through actions focused on enrollment, retention, and the bolstering of our own campus culture.

I remember early on in my presidency when Raye Clendening of the North County African American Women’s Association, and Alma Sisco Smith, and Satia Austin of the North San Diego County NAACP met with me to have a frank conversation about Black student success.

Our MOU is a direct outcome of those early conversations – truly a stunning example of what we can accomplish together through The Power of Us.

And speaking of our partnership with the North San Diego County NAACP, we are beyond honored to be a recipient of a 2022 Freedom Fighter Award.

I am so humbled.

We always know there is more work to be done.

Awards are wonderful signals that we are on the right track – but we all know that diversity, equity and inclusion work is never “one and done.”

It’s about how we continually mold and evolve our services, programs, offerings and policies to support all students of all backgrounds.

It's also about coming together to create the spaces, programs and opportunities for learning and engagement that allow our students to have the courage to evolve and find their true interests, passions and callings.

To boldly become who they are meant to be – and in doing so become the change we all need to see in our world.

One significant way we are stepping out as national leaders of student success is via the National Social Mobility Symposium, which we hosted right here on campus in June.

This is an event I had the privilege of founding at my previous institution.

Emceed by CSU Board Chair Wenda Fong and attended by university leaders, faculty and experts from across the nation – including The State University of New York system and the University System of Georgia – we spent two days in deep conversation about how higher ed can and must continue to pivot to serve the diverse needs of our students.

During a student panel – which included our very own Julia Glorioso as well as Jeremy Benjamin (who some of you met this morning as one of our volunteer student greeters), I felt so much pride as they spoke about the programs – from Project Rebound to Veterans Services to faculty mentoring – that have made such a difference in their lives.

Our students talked about what it feels like to be seen, appreciated, supported – and even challenged – by their peers and mentors in these spaces.

And it made me reflect how critical that – in an era of rising disconnection and divide – we continue to look for ways to bring people together to create true change across our region... and our world.

Many of you also know that we are a Hispanic Serving Institution – a federal designation based on enrollment demographics.

Here at CSUSM – our student enrollment is over 40% Hispanic/Latinx.

So, this spring we hosted our first summit to look at how we further enhance Latinx student success.

I give so much credit to summit organizer Dr. Renzo Lara, director of our Latinx Center.

And by the way, Dr. Lara was one of three CSUSM leaders recently named by the San Diego Business Journal and the San Diego County Imperial Valley Hispanic Chamber of Commerce as a “2022 Top 50 Latino Leader of Influence!”

Regina Frasca – our director of Safety, Health & Sustainability and Donna San Miguel, executive director of Community Engagement – were also honored.

This comes on top of news earlier this year that two more of our leaders were named by San Diego Business Journal and the Central San Diego Black Chamber of Commerce as 2022 Black Leaders of Influence:

- Vice President of Finance and Administrative Services Leon Wyden and
- Associate Vice President of Student Life, Dr. Gail Cole-Avent.

But it doesn't require an award for me to know that we have so many leaders who are championing inclusive excellence across campus.

In fact, this past year a taskforce came together to make recommendations for how we expand support for our Asian Pacific Islander Desi American students.

And another group has formed to look at what we can do to further support the success of our American Indian students.

As one next step, I've committed to creating an APIDA student center and an American Indian Student Center.

Supporting all of this great work, I'm so pleased that we have a new Vice President of Student Affairs, Dr. Viridiana Diaz, who joined us in January from Sacramento State, bringing with her two decades of experience in student success program development, implementation, and assessment.

She has a tremendous partner in our Chief Diversity Officer Dr. Aswad Allen, a nationally recognized thought leader on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion, who is working with our entire campus community to identify our DEI activities, integrate those efforts into our strategic plan and accelerate CSUSM toward accomplishing our overall mission of student success and social mobility.

In our new strategic plan, we also talk about intellectual engagement as a means of inspiring our students to find critical ways to make meaning of their lives and the complex ever-changing world around them.

When I think about that, I think about all the ways our faculty and staff are engaging our students in imagining a better shared future.

For example: Recently a team of students in our Summer Scholars program made a major research breakthrough related to their work on the auto-immune system disease alopecia areata.

Together they identified a new gene and are now writing a manuscript to report their exciting discovery.

One of the alums from that lab “Apple” Kasler, a first-generation scholar, immigrated to the U.S. with her mother.

While she was studying at MiraCosta, her mother passed away from cancer.

This difficult loss led Apple to make the commitment that one day she would find a cure – a dream she started in our alopecia lab led by Dr. Julie Jameson.

Today she’s living out her dream as a doctoral student at the world-class Sanford Burnham Prebys.

As a first-generation student – Apple epitomizes why we do what we do.

This is The Power of Us.

Another example of hands-on learning is the Cougar Fund, a student run investment fund with \$280,000 in assets under management by and for students.

Not only have our students made sustainable investments a priority, but an important part of their mission is generating funds for student scholarships and programs.

Let me also tell you about: arts, media and design student Salma Rodriguez, who recently won three student Emmy Awards for a class video project highlighting the personal stories of those who have immigrated from Mexico to the U.S.

Clearly, we are a national model of how to provide students with hands-on, real-world, and individualized learning opportunities.

This isn't just good for our students, it's good for our region, and it's good for our world.

Let me give you just a taste of exactly what I mean.

Last spring a Senior Experience team partnered with Dean Jennifer Ostergren and our College of Education, Health and Human Services to understand the impact of hands-on learning.

What was discovered was incredible.

Through community service, internships, and clinical practicums, our CEHHS students contribute over \$17 million.

Over 650,000 hours.

In 550 partner locations annually in free clinical, education, health and wellness services across our region and state.

Taking this a step further, Dean Ostergren is applying a futurist lens to think about where we go next in education, health and wellness in our region.

Two upcoming forums will delve into these topics, and we want and need your participation.

Some of our external partners – like our Community Partner of the Year, SchoolsFirst Credit Union – are already on the cutting edge of this work with us.

Earlier this year we celebrated the opening of our new SchoolsFirst Active Learning Lab that is allowing us to be at the forefront of K-12 teacher education.

You know, whenever I try to take in the full breadth of what happens here – in our labs, clinics, classrooms, and communities – I am exhilarated but also humbled.

Every day, our students, faculty and staff are addressing social issues, contributing to the expansion of knowledge, improving lives.

And our students are taking their place to be the experts and leaders of tomorrow.

For example, just this month a team of faculty led by Dr. Bianca Mothé received a nearly \$3 million, five-year grant from the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine to fund our new COMPASS program.

Combining hands-on research opportunities with faculty and industry mentorship – students will be prepared for careers in regenerative medicine.

At the same time, we will be able to provide youngsters as young as kindergarten with exposure to stem cell science in San Marcos Unified schools as well as at High Tech High North County.

This dovetails with our Bridges to Stem Cell Research Internship program, based here at CSUSM and in partnership with Palomar, MiraCosta, MSJC and San Diego Miramar Colleges.

Everywhere you look, research and creative scholarship abound.

American Indian studies professor and renowned artist, Dr. Eric Tippeconnic, recently showcased a collection of his work titled, “Our Existence is Our Resistance” in Kellogg Library.

The paintings – which depicted two of our American Indian students – were a visual “land acknowledgement,” telling a story of resiliency and pride in Native American cultures.

Dr. Paola Ometto, assistant professor of business administration, is developing a social enterprise incubation program that will train students about social innovation and help them create their own social enterprise.

And music professor Mtafiti Imara founded our Historically Black Colleges and Universities exchange program in 2020 to support Black student success and faculty professional development.

And it is now led by communication associate professor Dr. Gloria Pindi, who is supporting this year’s cohort on research related to communication and marketing.

Physics professor Dr. Gerardo Dominguez received a three-year, \$1.2 million grant from NASA to analyze samples from a near-Earth asteroid and utilize technology found only in his lab to answer some of the biggest questions about the origins of our solar system.

I share all of this with you so that you have a sense of the intellectual fire power housed here at your university.

And what I love the most is how our faculty place their role as teacher-scholars at the center of all they do, mentoring our students in their work.

These sorts of experiences are typically reserved for graduate students at other universities.

As we think about where we go next, we will be developing a long-range academic plan.

Our Provost, Dr. Carl Kemnitz, is kicking off this effort in partnership with our deans and faculty this fall to identify the programmatic themes that will support our regional and statewide impact.

As part of this, we'll be looking at CSUSM Temecula, where we are already working to expand offerings in engineering and early childhood education to complement existing programs in business and nursing that are in high demand right now.

And I'm pleased to share that in addition to taking classes at our longstanding Temecula campus, students can also now take classes in business and criminology at MSJC's Temecula Valley campus.

Not only does this space further serve our Southwest Riverside region, but it co-locates programs offered by MSJC, ensuring seamless transition for transfer students.

Also, in partnership with MiraCosta, we are looking forward to launching a 2+2 program to allow students to transfer into our online bachelor's in cybersecurity.

And at Palomar College we have a National Science Foundation funded initiative which helps increase the number of STEM graduates across both our institutions.

When I think of the community college leaders in this region, I know our leaders are second to none.

A huge thank you to:

- MiraCosta President Dr. Sunny Cooke, who has been a tremendous partner and friend to me since I arrived.
- Palomar College President Dr. Star Rivera-Lacey, who we are proud to claim as an alumna.
- MSJC President Roger Schultz, who is always ready to partner in service to Southwest Riverside.

And since I just mentioned our cybersecurity program I must digress for a moment and share another point of pride.

This past year, our cybersecurity students participated in the National Cyber League and placed in the top 20 out of 500 teams.

And – between you and me – they were the first in San Diego [a certain local UC was 97th].

When I think about our work to meet students where they are and dismantle barriers to success, I also think about our student veterans and active-duty students who especially need flexible schedules and class modalities.

In San Diego County alone, military veterans make up 13% of the population.

And here at CSUSM, we are proud to serve close to 2,000 military-connected students.

One of those students is Johnathan Rodney, who was selected as the CSUSM recipient of the 2022 CSU Trustees' Award for Outstanding Achievement – the highest recognition of student accomplishment in the CSU.

Majoring in biochemistry, Johnathan served five years as a U.S. Navy hospital corpsman.

At CSUSM, he served as Student Veterans Organization president, coordinating volunteer activities that support children with disabilities and veterans with PTSD.

He is currently applying to medical school.

We are working with donors to fund a new director of military relations to support amazing student veterans like Johnathan, who demonstrate such wonderful volunteerism and academic promise.

And, thanks to the efforts of Dr. Patricia Prado-Olmos in Community Engagement and Jessica Berger in University Advancement, a new military advisory committee will help guide our efforts in serving our military-affiliated students moving forward.

And I really want to thank Major General Tony Jackson – one of our long-standing Foundation Board Directors – for guiding us in this effort.

For 33 years, CSUSM has grown up with our region, always striving to be responsive to our community, partnering with leaders to meet the needs of today and tomorrow.

And when you consider the amount of growth taking place, it's really quite something to behold.

For example, I've watched from my office as the new Kaiser Hospital came up along with the massive North City project transforming San Marcos.

And I'm happy to have with us today our City of San Marcos leaders:

- Mayor Rebecca Jones and
- Councilmembers
- Maria Nunez,
- Randy Walton, and
- Ed Musgrove.
- As well as County Supervisor Jim Desmond.

Our local leaders have been visionary in helping our region innovate and evolve.

Recently, at an economic summit hosted by Erik Bruvold and the regional EDC right here in this ballroom, it was shared that if North County were its own state, it would be larger than eight others in the U.S., both by population and employment.

And that's not even considering the unprecedented growth taking place in Southwest Riverside and South Orange counties.

The trajectory we are seeing is incredible, and what's exciting is how Cal State San Marcos is truly at the center of it!

People are taking note at what we are doing here.

We just welcomed 300 additional new residents at North Commons – our first traditional residence hall.

And we opened our first dining hall.

All made possible with our partners North City.

And that's not all!

We were just awarded \$91 million in the state budget to build an affordable housing project.

This will transform our residential and dining experience on campus.

We are hoping to put shovels in the ground as early as next December.

This growth is so exciting.

This year, we celebrated the grand opening of our new Innovation Hub on the ground floor of our Extended Learning Building, funded through a generous grant from the Conrad Prebys Foundation.

Innovation is nothing new for us.

And the Hub takes our innovation ecosystem to the next level with an emphasis on equity, inclusion and social change.

For example, this spring, we hosted our first Startup Week, featuring a seminar on such new technologies as cryptocurrency, blockchain and NFTs, as well as a student quick-pitch competition modeled after the reality show “Shark Tank.”

The first edition of that contest, held last fall, led to business student Sophia Lombardi launching her own zero-waste swimsuit company, using leftover fabric scraps that would otherwise go in a landfill.

And another exciting development: Dean Jennifer Fabbi is working with library faculty to create a makerspace where students can design, experiment, build and invent, redefining what a library is on a college campus.

And that’s not all.

As we think about working with our vibrant community, and developing our academic plan, we will embark on a new facilities master planning process.

The master planning process involves accessing the current and future needs of our university, local industry, and our region.

And when we think about our future evolution, we know that opportunities abound as the life sciences and biotech industries move north.

With that in mind, I am so excited to tell you about the next project that truly represents the convergence of our efforts.

An Integrated Science and Engineering Building – which will be our first publicly funded academic building in over a decade.

Not only is it destined to be an exciting and engaging learning venue but also a magnet of student, faculty, alumni and industry collaboration that will support San Diego County and our greater region.

And it will be fundamental to growing our engineering program – which is three years young but already named a preferred provider of software and electrical engineering talent by the San Diego Regional EDC.

We are launching computer engineering next fall and with this new facility we will be able to advance mechanical, industrial and systems engineering next.

Growing a diverse pipeline of engineers and scientists is critical to driving our region's economy – and we know North County is the next frontier for biotech and life science firms as they accelerate research, development and manufacturing operations here in our own backyard.

And if that's not enough, here's the really great news:

This building has moved up to #3 on the CSU priority list for state funding, placing it as the No. 1 academic building on the list – and we received \$5 million in design funding.

This will be transformational for our entire campus, allowing us to accommodate and engage more students ACROSS disciplines and backgrounds which is, in the end, what it's all about.

Together we are truly unleashing The Power of Us and now is the time to hit the accelerator.

And here's a final piece of our strategic plan – how we work together to further elevate our institution to new heights.

I am so grateful to our donors who know that when they invest in CSUSM, they receive an excellent return through the lives they change.

This spring, we were honored to receive a transformative \$1-million-dollar gift from our Foundation Board Chair, Steve Wagner, and his wife, Laura.

Together they seeded the Stone Brewing Fund for Social Mobility, which supports some of our long-term priorities as well as immediate needs. A truly transformational gift.

And last November, on Giving Day, we raised nearly half a million dollars in just 24 hours – making it the highest single day of giving in our history.

Even more importantly, the day provided much needed support for programs like our Cougar Career Closet, student-run food pantry, STEM research labs, and athletics – just to name a few.

We aim to be the investment of choice by state and federal agencies as well as the private and philanthropic sectors.

And through The Power of Us we will set the stage for our most ambitious philanthropic campaign to fuel our great aspirations and goals.

This morning, I hope you feel as excited and energized as I do about what we can accomplish together.

In our short history, CSUSM has already accomplished so much in our educational mission.

Now, through The Power of Us, we are taking our work to the next level:

- Educating and preparing tomorrow's leaders and changemakers for the challenges ahead.
- Building state-of-the-art infrastructure so that we can achieve our full potential.
- Fostering an environment that allows research and innovations to flourish.
- And creating social mobility for our diverse and talented students and their families.

We can achieve these objectives. Cal State San Marcos is not just a university, we are an elevator of social mobility, an engine of inclusive economic growth.

Not many universities can say that.

But there is no other university like CSUSM.

Together, we will continue to rise.

To thrive!

To be that beacon of where the future of higher ed is going.

And I couldn't be prouder or more thankful to have you as our partners in this work.

To the power of you.

To the power of us.

To the power of CSUSM.

Thank you all!