

Transcription

California Community Colleges Podcast Episode 7 – Timothy White

Eloy: Hi, everyone. I'm Eloy Ortiz Oakley, Chancellor of the California Community Colleges, and welcome to another edition of the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Podcasts. Today, I'm joined by the chancellor of the California State University System, Chancellor Timothy White. Tim, it's great to have you with us. And, first of all, let me begin by just thanking you for all the great work the CSU does on behalf of California and particularly as it relates to our California Community College transfer students. Welcome.

Timothy: It's nice to be here my friend.

Eloy: So there's been quite a bit going on in the CSU. We are very appreciative of all the work that you do personally and that the system does to align with the California Community Colleges and particularly since our students look to the CSU as their number one transfer pathway. And we're very proud that they do. So the California Community Colleges recently launched their vision for success which tries to capture some key elements that we're gonna be focused on. We're gonna be focused on closing the achievement gaps, we're gonna be focused on increasing transfer, improving remedial education, and really giving a much clearer pathway for students from the time they enter our colleges to the time that they transfer or complete their certificates. So I know the CSU has its own initiative, the CSU graduation initiatives. How do you think it aligns with the Community Colleges? And tell us a little bit about what you're trying to accomplish.

Timothy: Well, thank you, Eloy. Again, it's nice to be with you today. It's really actually very complimentary. And you said, it's nice timing between the two systems that we've done this. The graduation initiative is designed to increase the number of students earning a high-quality degree in a shorter amount of time, and therefore increasing the number of people who enter into California's economy or going to grad school or professional school in a shorter amount of time. You know, we've

been...a lot of conversation focuses on what is your fore, how many students are in their bachelor's degrees in four years or six years.

But the truth of the matter is when you think about the real intent here is students earn their degrees as some, a few, less than four years, who start as freshmen. Others take four and a half or five. Sometimes, six or seven in many respects because often these students are a little bit older than average. They may be working one or two jobs and maybe raising a family. And so there's life issues as well as academic issues. Our intent on the graduation initiative is to move the entire success curve for our students essentially up into the left. In other words, if a student is on the four-and-a-half-year plan, that we make sure that they try and get through and can get through in four years. If they're on the six-year plan, let's try and get them through in five years. That's a savings of both time and money to them as well as savings of money to the state of California.

So we have numbers that we're trying to reach. We're trying to double the number of students that graduate in four years up to 40%, things of that nature. We're working very hard on the number of the time it takes for transfer students to come in with an ADT degree to get them to their bachelor's degree in just two years. That's the main point of the graduation initiative.

The second main point of it is that these achievement or opportunity or equity gaps that exist among the various student when you look at them from a demographic point of view, a low-income versus high income, students of color from students who may have gone to very good high schools in the public or private setting, we are absolutely committed and put a stake in the ground that we are going to work day and night until we get rid of every one of those equity gaps. And that release sends a couple messages, first of all, to the student, him or herself, that look at just because you come from a low-income environment doesn't mean we think you are any less capable of succeeding. And so it allows her to put her shoulders back and her head up and jump in and feel like she can succeed. And, likewise, I think it sends a message that it's gonna take perhaps extra effort to get her to succeed in a short amount of time because she didn't have the resources to go to summer science camp or to travel or to participate in theater or music because of the nature of their economic background personally or in the schools that that person attended.

So we know that takes extra effort, extra resources to have that person

succeed. But my goodness, what better investment than to have inclusive excellence in the CSU. And that's what this is really about. It's to bring people who have the ability and the willingness to go to work, to get to degree sooner, and it ties in with your initiative, the Community Colleges. And particularly, the transfers because what a great way to the lower-division done at the Community College and just slide right in and get your upper division done and then get on to whatever is next.

Eloy: No, absolutely. And I'd like to just take a moment to talk about this equity issue. For those listeners who don't really understand the Community College and the CSU, I mean the Community Colleges have 114 colleges serving over 2 million students and really reflect what California looks like. CSU, 23 campuses. And how many students are you serving these days?

Timothy: Four hundred and eighty thousand.

Eloy: It's got to be the largest public university system in the nation, I would imagine.

Timothy: Yes, it is.

Eloy: And we're the largest community college system in the nation. So together, we really do have a major impact not only on the state but on the nation. And so this equity issue, I would imagine, is a key issue. I mean our colleges and universities are filled with the kind of people that we need in the workforce. Are there some specific things that you're working on at the campus level that will help this equity piece?

Timothy: Yes, there are a couple I'd like to mention, but let me try and put a number on this for a second. Over the last five years, we've increased enrollment at the CSU 23 campuses by 42,000 students. Of those 42,000, 35,000 are Pell recipients, which is a proxy for being of low income. Now, that's on top of our already existing population of several hundred thousand. But 35,000 new students that are Pell, that is more Pell students totally enrolled at all the Ivy League's plus USC, UCLA, and UC Berkeley. So if you want to know the type of student that we are privileged to reach and to touch and to help educate and get to the degree, it is students who come from perhaps a lack of opportunity rather than an abundance of opportunity. But California, to your point, needs them to be in the workforce. And we will not succeed as a state if they don't have that opportunity.

So we've done a couple things. We've changed the way in which we're evaluating and executing academic preparation. In the past, we had a whole series of tests students would take, including entry level math and the entry-level writing test. We found those last two tests to have no predictive value. They added cost, they added frustration, and or one more example of keeping people out who otherwise should be in. So we've gotten back and looked at what are the sort of variables that we should be looking at and making admission decisions on. It's the things like the high school grade point, their advanced placement classes, the ACT and SAT, the smarter balanced assessment test and things of that nature.

But more importantly, when they get to us, if they have a soft spot in let's say mathematics, we wanna get them in a course that deals with a soft spot but also gives them academic credit to degree. So their effort is rewarded by making progress to degree, taking care with perhaps supplemental instruction or other techniques to advance but nonetheless also making progress to degree. We've also gonna double down a bit on our early start program or students coming out of high school or in fact out of Community College have a chance in the summer to have college bearing course credit taking care of some of these needs.

Eloy: That sounds great and that really does dovetail with a lot of work that we're doing the Community Colleges. We also have seen clearly that standardized placement exams disadvantage many of our students. So we are reworking that whole element as well as looking at alternative math pathways and others. So we really appreciate the work that you're doing in the CSU because it really does support this work across the spectrum. You know, I heard an amazing statistic not too long ago that some of your campuses, like Long Beach or Fullerton, they graduate more Pell-eligible students in one year than the entire Ivy League combined. That's pretty amazing and that's true value for a state in our community.

Timothy: Well, when you think with that degree and the type of career a person can have, which today's careers have multiple jobs, but they are in earning potential, is really the vehicle by which they have the social ascent, the socioeconomic status, and create opportunity for themselves, their families, and their communities. So it's really a very powerful outcome.

Eloy: So one of the other pieces that is critical, I think, to the relationship

between the CSU and the Community Colleges has been the work around the associate's degree for transfer. This began around 2012-2013. We've always had a good relationship between the CSU and the Community Colleges, but this really laid out a very clear pathway for Community College students to transfer with an associate's degree by taking 60 units to the Community College, having a guaranteed spot at the CSU, and then another 60 units toward a degree.

Of the more than 11,000 students who earned an associate's degree for transfer in 2013-2014, more than 83% transfer to a four-year institution within two years. And the recent data from the CSU show that students who transfer with these degrees are better prepared and more likely to earn a bachelor's degree than undergraduates transfers who don't have an associate's degree for transfer. So it sounds like it's been successful. What can we do to continue to build on that success?

Timothy: Well, it is embedded in our graduation initiative and embedded in your vision. I think one of the big needs, apparently, is that there's not as much awareness at the entry level into the Community Colleges about this program. And therefore, at the very beginning of their enrollments with the Community Colleges, are they taking the right courses in the right sequence? So that's a big part of it. It's awareness. And I know there's many efforts underway to do that. I also want you to know that we have, as part of our graduation initiative, currently about 31% of the students who come to us with that ADT degree get through in two years. In other words, just two years upper division with us. We are bound and determined to make that 48%. So going up almost to 50%.

And, secondly, those who come in currently, who get their bachelor's degree in three years, is 65%. And part of our graduation initiative is a commitment to get that to 80%. So we are doubling down on our side also to make sure these students come in, that they are welcomed, and they are put in the right sequence of courses. But it is a great communication and collaboration between the faculty of the Community College and the faculty of the CSU. And I don't want to lose track of the importance because it's at that place, the interface between faculty, its students, and academic advisors, where this magic actually happens.

Eloy: And it's wonderful to see when the faculty of the Community College and the CSU get together. Because I think that's just a tremendous benefit for all Californians. That we have our core faculty really talking about how they can create clear pathways and really

understand how we're both preparing our students for the jobs of the future. So I know one of the challenges that the CSU has faced, particularly in the last five, 10 years, is the nature of aging facilities in the CSU. What are your thoughts about how California can help improve the ability of the CSU to have more capacity for more transfer students, for more freshmen, and to give them the kinds of facilities that really prepare them for the jobs of the future?

Timothy: Well, first, I wanna be careful on this aging question because I had a birthday in July. But nonetheless...

Eloy: Is there some infrastructure we can help you with?

Timothy: Yeah. My shoulder, you know. My hips, no. When you think about California's investment in facilities in the California State University...because after all, we are the California State University. We belong to the people of California and people often call us the people's University. We have something like eighty-six and a half million square feet of space. Well, that sounds like a big number. Let me translate that into...that's 1,400 football fields. And, well, over 50% of our facilities are about 42 years of age or older. You know, as a homeowner or living in a rental, there's some deferred maintenance, the regular maintenance, that has to happen with air handling systems, electricity, water, etc, etc. We've not been able to have any help from the state of California in the last decade or so with respect to being accessing bonds for construction purposes. And as a consequence, we have had to take money that would otherwise go to pay for classrooms, for classes and teachers, faculty in front of our students. We've had to divert some of those operating funds into paying debt service, really a mortgage, on going out and borrowing money in order to maintain our facilities.

So I think one of the things particularly with the gubernatorial election coming up is as Californians, we should really hold our candidates' feet to the fire on their commitment to public higher education in general but also with respect to facilities. And I think there is the PPIC recently reported that the majority of Californians are willing to actually pay for a general obligation bond to help with the facilities for public higher education. So the will of the people seems to be there. We now need to get the will of the politicians to align with that. That'll be a huge boost because we can then deal with facilities in that way and redirect our existing operating funds to teach more students and get them two degrees sooner.

Eloy: I think that's so important. The Community Colleges have had the benefit of being able to go directly to voters in our communities. I know of a college I recently came from in Long Beach. We raised over \$1.4 billion from local taxpayers and the CSU doesn't have that same advantage. So for our students, we really hope that the CSU can find an opportunity to update its facilities because our students deserve the very best learning facilities that the state can possibly provide. Now, you mentioned the PPIC poll. Let me pivot to the PPIC poll and we'll close on this. But, the Public Policy Institute of California came out recently with its annual survey of perceptions of higher education in our state. All three systems, the Community Colleges, the CSU, and the University of California, were rated very well for quality. 63% or more approve for each segment. Voters remain concerned about affordability, though. And that is, in some regards, directly related to the cost of just living in California. But the perception is that college and university costs continue to go up.

One of the more productive pieces of the data and the survey deals with people's perception of whether college education is even necessary for success. And there's some troubling partisan and racial divisions that are emerging. For example, half of Democrats, about 51% say college education is necessary while most Republicans, 67%, and independents, 59%, say that there are many other ways to succeed. There are also strong differences across racial and ethnic groups. Two-thirds of Latinos say that higher education is critically important for their future and this is true of African-Americans as well. So given all this news from the PPIC poll, what are your thoughts about how we, as higher education, move forward and continued to show the public the value of a higher education, particularly, a higher education that's publicly funded?

Timothy: Well, you know, there's always a conversation about, "Is the public higher education a public good or a private good?" And for me, that's the wrong question, the wrong debate. It's a false dichotomy. They're both important. Certainly, if you have an associate's degree or a credential, technical credential, in the Community Colleges, or a bachelor's degree, or a higher degree, or a teaching certificate, whatever the credential or degree might be, those individuals are able to enter the workforce in a higher paying job, a job that is less likely to be laid off during a good or bad economic times, particularly, in bad economic times. And it is that employment then that really is the basis by which they can socially and economically move up in society and be self-actualizing. Yes, there are plenty of stories about the Bill Gates in the world. He

didn't finish college and they've gone on to enormous success. And there are stories about people who have as many degrees as there are under the Sun who have been abject failures. But those are the very, very rare exceptions when you look at the totality of America. And the evidence is overwhelmingly positive that with a degree that is relevant to a person's ability and interest level, that they will have a much more productive economic life and social life because of the ability to have that degree.

So I would say part of California's need is to invest in this. It's really the seed corn of California's future, both economically and socially. And, again, referring to a different PPIC report that's maybe now 18 months or so old, it pointed out that for California to sustain the economy by the year 2030, that we had to collectively get a million more bachelor's degrees into the workforce. Well, when the California State University analyzed the PPIC report, we own half of that number. We produced half the bachelor's degrees in California compared to all of the UCs and the privates and the for-profits. So we have to up our game by 500,000. That's gonna require our resources. People don't want to wish and to go up and I agree with that. So the only other way to do this then is for us to maximize effectiveness and efficiencies, which we do every day, but also to have the state realize that a dollar spent in higher education, whether it's Community College, CSU, or the University of California, that that is a huge return on the ultimate investment for the state of California.

Eloy: Well, I certainly agree with you, Chancellor White. I mean this is critical, I think, for the future of California. And our public systems, as wonderful as they are at access, we need to continue to partner with the public to continue to show our value. And we both agree that there is great value in our public systems. So I want to thank you, again, for the great work that you're doing. We really see the CSU as our main partner in public education. And we very much appreciate all the work that your 23 campuses do partnering with our 114 campuses in really creating not only great leadership in higher education for California but really leading the way for the entire country.

So thank you for joining us today. I've been talking with Chancellor Timothy White of the California State University System and you've been listening to the California Community College Chancellor's Podcast. It's great to have you, Tim. We look forward to continuing to work with you and thanks to all our listeners for joining us again. We'll see you again soon.

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This has been a California Community Colleges presentation.