

## Cal State chooses first Mexican American chancellor

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**Byline:** Mikhail Zinshteyn and Felicia Mello

### Body

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Sep 23, 2020( CalMatters: <https://calmatters.org> Delivered by Newstex) In summary The Cal State system's new leader, Joseph I. Castro, starts next January and is the first California native and first Mexican American to hold the post. The next head of the California State University system — with 480,000 students, largest public four-year university in the U.S. — will be the first California native and the first Mexican American chancellor to oversee it. The CSU Board of Trustees selected Joseph I. Castro, current president at Fresno State, to helm the 23-campus California State University system, which has been walloped by the financial fallout left by the coronavirus pandemic. Managing budget concerns and Cal State's public health anxieties will be key tasks for Castro, who takes the reins Jan. 4. The CSU Board of Trustees selected Castro in a closed door meeting this week after a six-month search — assisted by executive search firm Isaacson, Miller — to replace outgoing Chancellor Timothy P. White, who said he was retiring last October<sup>[1]</sup> but stayed on through the fall term to guide the system through the pandemic. The search began in November but stalled between March and July as the CSU battled the effects of COVID-19. The pandemic has hammered CSU's finances, which has spent nearly \$200 million through July on new expenses and refunds related to the coronavirus.

After a colossal collapse in state revenue, CSU's operating budget for 2020-21 has shrunk 4.4%<sup>[2]</sup> compared to last year, the result of a \$299 million cut in state funding and tuition and fee revenue declines of \$16 million. Managing budget concerns and Cal State's public health anxieties will be key tasks for Castro, who takes the reins Jan. 4. Few Cal State campuses<sup>[3]</sup> rolled out widespread testing for students who returned to live on campus — a small fraction of the typical population of students who live in CSU dorms and apartments. That the virus shows no signs of abating prompted the current CSU chancellor, White, to keep campuses largely virtual<sup>[4]</sup> through the 2020-21 academic year. Castro will receive a starting salary of \$625,000. That's nearly double his salary at Fresno State of \$339,000, according to 2019 Chronicle of Higher Education data, but lower than some of the salaries of executives leading smaller state university systems<sup>[5]</sup> in the U.S. Current Chancellor White's salary is \$478,000. Castro will also receive a monthly auto allowance of \$1,000 and an annual housing allowance of \$95,000. Castro hails from the San Joaquin Valley town of Hanford, and sees growing up in the Central Valley as core to his identity. 'My family immigrated here 100 years ago,' he told CalMatters in an interview. 'My great grandfather helped to build the railroad through the valley.' Raised by a single mother and the first in his family to graduate from a university, Castro blazed through academe, earning his bachelor's and master's degrees at UC Berkeley and his Ph.D in higher-education policy and leadership from Stanford University. Since 2013, he's been president of California State University, Fresno, which has received national recognition for graduating a high rate of low-income students<sup>[6]</sup>. Like White<sup>[7]</sup>, Castro is a veteran of the University of California system, where he was vice chancellor of student academic affairs at the University of California, San Francisco, which focuses on medicine. Castro spoke to CalMatters about how he thinks the pandemic will fundamentally change the way the

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CSU delivers education, why he wants to give back, and whether or not he thinks CSU executives should take a pay cut. The following interview has been lightly edited for length and clarity. Keep tabs on the latest California policy and politics news CalMatters: It's not an easy time to lead a university system, with the pandemic busting budgets and forcing classes online, and increased pressure to meet student demands around racial equity. What made you want to take on this challenge? Castro: It was the onset of COVID that really inspired me to step up during this time. I think the CSU is the most consequential higher education system in the country right now, during COVID and certainly in the years after. I've been blessed to have a great higher education that transformed my own life and I've been trying to give back ever since. Earlier this year, Cal State made the decision not to require that campuses routinely test students living in dorms or attending on-campus classes for the coronavirus. We are seeing growing COVID-19 outbreaks on campuses nationwide, including San Diego State, where nearly 1,000 students, faculty and staff are now infected. Should the university move to require this testing for all students on campus? I know that our views about testing have evolved over time. My own personal view and the way that I've led here at Fresno State was to implement baseline testing and then now monthly testing, and we did mandatory testing for those who lived in student housing. And I'm happy to share with you that here we are a month into this semester, and so far we have fewer than 10 cases. I'm not sure it's wise to mandate testing at every campus for everybody, but I do believe that testing is an important component. My hope is that by next summer, if there is a vaccine that's distributed in a fair way, that we can start to have more people here safely on each of the campuses and by next fall hopefully it'll look more like March than it does now. Cal State took a hit to its state appropriations this year as the pandemic pummeled California's economy, and campuses are already seeing staff layoffs. On the plus side, the university has some reserves, which it is already dipping into. How can the CSU navigate this budget crisis without placing a bigger burden on students or staff, who are also suffering financially from the pandemic? I think it's a lot like at home: It's trying to be smart about how we spend money. And I know that I've learned a lot in the last six months about how to reduce expenses that were not necessary during COVID — you know, no traveling, no events. We've looked at our management structure here and we've made adjustments because COVID has created a different work level for some people. So all of those things came first, and I think that's the right way to do it, to not do anything to affect the quality of teaching and learning. And then, to try to keep layoffs to a minimum. As it relates to reserves, in my view, it's not smart to spend your whole savings account at one time. So I think it's about managing it carefully and using some of it during this difficult time, but not all of it because we have no idea what's around the corner, and whether things are going to get worse. I don't believe we're going to go back to March in terms of teaching and learning. I believe we're going to a new and exciting place.' JOSEPH I. CASTRO, NEW CSU CHANCELLOR The university, along with others around the country, has been engaged in a massive, unplanned experiment in online learning. How do you think what we've learned from this pandemic might change how Cal State educates students in the future? I don't believe we're going to go back to March in terms of teaching and learning. I believe we're going to a new and exciting place. And it will be about how the faculty are experiencing this and professors that say, 'You know, I'm more effective teaching in this virtual space. I've learned how to do it effectively, and I don't want to go back. Or maybe I want to do some of my courses this way because it helps me in terms of my family's situation.' I serve a lot of students who are very challenged getting to Fresno State from a rural area. We had been working on that before COVID, [providing] free transportation from different rural communities. If they have the technology, for some of these students, they might actually prefer this kind of learning. Now for others, they're going to say no, I want high touch, and faculty will say I want to teach in person, and they'll rush to come back to do that. But I don't think that everybody's going to want to do that, and so that's where the innovation is going to come in. And when you take the stress of COVID away, it could lead to some very exciting outcomes. Do you support Proposition 16 to reinstate affirmative action? Absolutely, yes. What are specific admissions or hiring policies you'd introduce or advocate for that are currently barred because of Proposition 209 and its ban on using race, ethnicity and sex in hiring, contracting and admissions? My thinking has been shaped about giving opportunities to talented people who normally wouldn't be given those opportunities.' JOSEPH I. CASTRO, NEW CSU CHANCELLOR Well let me give you an example because it came up recently. We have a very competitive program in nursing. And that means that there's a waitlist. I had a case recently with an African American woman who wanted to be a nurse, it was her life dream. Lots of struggling along the way and she's right there and she's on the waitlist. And I can't admit her over other students who might have comparable, maybe just a little bit different GPA, but not nearly the struggle she's had. I would like to have the tool to be able to admit more students of color who have great promise but maybe they've had struggles and we have not been able to admit them because of the constraints around Proposition 209. And as you know, we don't have enough African American students in the CSU

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or in higher education in general. So, I would like to have tools that enable us to deal with that challenge and this would be one to do that. You are deeply familiar with California's Central Valley, having been born and led a campus there. How will this shape your tenure as Chancellor? Well, it's core to my being. My family immigrated here 100 years ago. My great grandfather helped to build the railroad through the valley. My grandfather was a dreamer of his time. And they lived in tents along the railroad and began their lives in tents in my hometown. So my thinking has been shaped about, you know, giving opportunities to talented people who normally wouldn't be given those opportunities — including people like me. There's talent in every household, so our job is to unleash that talent and support them and by doing that we will strengthen California and the whole country. You will earn a salary of \$625,000, a significant increase from your predecessor, Tim White, who earned about \$478,000. UC's president and campus chancellors each took 10 percent pay cuts in recognition of the current budget crisis. Do you think Cal State executives should do the same? Will you personally pledge to do so? I don't believe the trustees plan to make any decisions like that for the CSU. I'm very grateful for the salary that I'm going to earn. That's not why I'm in this work. I'm in this work because higher education transformed my life as a college student, and I want to give back. Having said that, there are market issues and I think that the trustees looked at that and that's how they made their decision. And I think that that's important for the CSU because I want to make sure that we continue to identify the most talented and diverse leaders, and we'll need to compete with other universities to do that. So I can't speak for the board on that, but as far as I know, they don't wish to entertain an idea like that at this time. One of the most distinctive aspects of your Cal State Fresno presidency has been your Twitter feed, where you frequently answer students' questions in real time. Tell us a little bit more about why you choose to interact with students that way, and will you continue to do that as Chancellor? I started doing this at UCSF and I brought that experience to Fresno State. And what I learned here about social media is it actually deepened my connections with the students and to some extent the alumni. Most of the interactions I have you don't even see because they'll direct message me and say, 'I'm having this problem.' I'm on the waitlist for this class, or I have a financial aid issue. 'Who can help me?' And then I'll find the right person on the campus to help them. So I want to play that role as chancellor, to hear from them directly. So will you leave your DMs open as Chancellor? Absolutely. Support in-depth reporting that matters As a nonprofit newsroom, we rely on the generosity of Californians like you to cover the issues that matter. If you value our reporting, support our journalism with a donation. [ 1]: <https://calmatters.org/education/higher-education/2019/10/csu-chancellor-tim-white-retiring-california-cal-state-uc/> [ 2]: <https://www2.calstate.edu/csu-system/board-of-trustees/past-meetings/2020/Documents/sept-20-23-FULL-AGENDA-Binder.pdf> [ 3]: <https://calmatters.org/education/2020/09/college-coronavirus-testing-california/> [ 4]: <https://www2.calstate.edu/csu-system/news/Documents/Chancellor%20message%209.10.20.pdf> [ 5]: [https://www.chronicle.com/article/executive-compensation-at-public-and-private-colleges/#id=table\\_public\\_2019](https://www.chronicle.com/article/executive-compensation-at-public-and-private-colleges/#id=table_public_2019) [ 6]: <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/california-state-university-fresno-1147> [ 7]: <https://ucrtoday.ucr.edu/9298>

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