

Fresno State's Joseph Castro sets target for speeding up graduations at D.C. summit

By Hannah
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Fresno State University President Joseph Castro.

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Fresno State President Joseph Castro says he wants to bump up student six-year graduation rates to 70% by 2024, the first time he's set an official target for getting students through the university more quickly.

The [most recent university figures](#) show about 52% of Fresno Students graduate within six years. Just 16% complete their degrees within four years.

Since his hiring in 2013, Castro has beat the drum on raising the school's academic and athletic profiles. He says the new goal would help position Fresno State as a national leader.

"Our priority focus on student success will lead to a dramatic increase in our graduation rate," Castro said in a statement. "Students, families and communities throughout the Valley and beyond will benefit from the contributions of our graduates — the next generation of leaders."

Castro set the goal Thursday during an education summit in Washington, D.C. The White House College Opportunity

Summit was hosted by President Barack Obama and first lady Michelle Obama. It attracted education leaders from across the country to discuss increasing college graduates and strengthening partnerships between K-12 schools and universities.

Getting to 70% would mean an increase of about two percentage points a year until 2024. The plan fits into a larger California State University systemwide effort to boost graduation rates. By spring 2015, the CSU system expects to meet its goal of improving its average six-year graduation rate to 54%, up eight percentage points from 2009.

CSU spokesman Michael Uhlenkamp said the CSU trustees will set a new long-term target at their January board meeting.

Another Valley higher education official also attended Thursday's summit in Washington. Dorothy Leland, chancellor of the University of California at Merced, reported on the progress made on six initiatives to help underserved students succeed that she unveiled in January, including a "career boot camp" program for undocumented students, the Silicon Valley Pathways Program and a resource center for science, technology, engineering and math (STEM).

"UC Merced is proud to be a part of this prestigious and vitally important effort, and we are even prouder of the steps we have taken as a university to serve our students more effectively," Leland said in a statement. "Every student has his or her own strengths, circumstances and challenges, and our job is to ensure they all have the tools, knowledge and support they need to succeed."

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