

# State Center chancellor to Fresno Unified superintendent: You're wrong about local community colleges

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State Center Community College District Interim Chancellor Bill Stewart took the unusual step of writing Fresno Unified School District Superintendent Michael Hanson a scathing letter, saying Hanson maligned the college district in a speech this week.

The [correspondence on State Center letterhead](#), dated Oct. 27 and copied to both boards, states that Hanson gave false information during [the district's annual State of Education luncheon](#) on Oct. 26 and says that Fresno Unified sends more unprepared students to community colleges than other local districts.

"You provided the large crowd with erroneous information about State Center Community College District and Fresno City College completion rates," Stewart says in the letter.

The letter stems from one particular comment Hanson made during the speech. Hanson said that many Fresno Unified students would be moving on to a community college system that's "underperforming both in their training programs and their academic programs."

Stewart disagrees with the statement. Students who are prepared for college, he says, have a 66.1 percent completion rate at Fresno City College. Students who are "unprepared" – those who must take remedial courses in English or math – have a completion rate of 33.4 percent. Those rates are 71.6 percent for prepared and 36.4 percent for unprepared at Reedley and Clovis, Stewart says.

These numbers are comparable to statewide averages, Stewart says, which sit at 69.7 percent for prepared and 39.2 percent for unprepared students.

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State Center Community College District Interim Chancellor Bill Stewart in a memo to Fresno Unified Superintendent Michael Hanson

Stewart also takes issue with Hanson's comments about students of color.

"In the six-year graduation rate, for a two-year program, for black and brown kids is under 20 percent," [Hanson said in his address](#). "Three-quarters of the youth I serve as superintendent ... move into a place that has very abysmal results for their completing or transferring to Fresno State or UC Merced."

In his rebuttal, Stewart says the completion rates at Fresno City College – students who either complete an associate's degree or certificate or transfer to a four-year college – are much better than what Hanson claimed: 72 percent for prepared African American students, 30.9 percent for unprepared; 59.2 percent for prepared Hispanic students and 32.2 percent for unprepared.

Stewart also fires back at the local kindergarten-12th-grade district, saying that Fresno Unified had the highest percentage of local unprepared students funneling into State Center Community College District.

Fresno Unified students accounted for 31 percent of State Center enrollment, Stewart says. And 78 percent of those students were not prepared for college, as compared to 63 percent for Central Unified and numbers in the 45 percent

to 53 percent range for Clovis, Kings Canyon (Reedley-Orange Cove) and Madera districts.

Hanson prefaced the statements that Stewart quotes in the letter by saying he “wasn’t doing this to be pejorative.” The statements were for the public’s benefit, he said, “so that we can all rally around State Center Community College in a positive way.”

It’s highly unusual in Fresno for an education system leader to publicly criticize the superintendent of a school system. But the exchange that Hanson started set off State Center leaders to the point that they responded publicly. And State Center says it has warned Hanson about his line of thought before.

Stewart was not available for comment Thursday, but State Center spokeswoman Lucy Ruiz said that he spoke with Hanson a few months ago after he learned that Fresno Unified’s leader had said similar things at an FUSD board meeting.

Stewart deemed the letter necessary after he watched Hanson say the same things once again to 400-plus people at the DoubleTree hotel in downtown Fresno, Ruiz said.

“It was unfortunate that the incorrect information was shared with so many people during the luncheon,” Stewart says in the final paragraph of his letter.

The letter includes links to the California Community Colleges [website](#), where Stewart’s statistics were taken from.

Hanson told the crowd that he spoke about the issue during a board meeting, but said “it’s time to be even more public.”

Hanson said in a statement Thursday that he was attempting to show the increasing need for collaboration between both districts to ensure students move through higher education more successfully.

He said that Fresno Unified took a step forward at the Oct. 28 board meeting, where trustees approved an application for a \$500,000 grant from College Futures Foundation to increase the rate of bachelor’s degree completion for local low-income students.

This money would “fund a deeper partnership” between Fresno Unified, State Center, Fresno State and UC Merced, he added.

Hanson said the statistics he mentioned during his address were taken from the U.S. Department of Education’s [college scorecard](#).

He believes community college completion statistics are outdated and hopes to use some of this potential grant money to work with State Center to develop their own numbers.