

[Home](#) » [Central Valley native, Dr. Joseph I. Castro, happy to be 'coming home' as Fresno State president](#)[< Previous](#) [Next >](#)

SECTIONS

[> ACADEMICS](#)[> CAMPUS & COMMUNITY](#)[> RESEARCH](#)[> ALUMNI](#)[> PRESS RELEASES](#)[> FEATURED VIDEOS](#)

NEWS SOURCES

[> Fresno State Magazine](#)

Central Valley native, Dr. Joseph I. Castro, happy to be 'coming home' as Fresno State president

It was a proud day for the Central Valley, as one of its own, Dr. Joseph I. Castro, of Hanford, Calif., was named the eighth president of Fresno State by the California State University Trustees.

Castro, 46, currently Vice Chancellor for Student Academic Affairs at the University of California, San Francisco, will assume his new position as president on Aug. 1, 2013.

"He is the right fit for Fresno State at this time," said CSU Trustee and Chair of the Presidential Search Committee, Dr. Peter Mehas of Fresno, during a press teleconference with Castro today.

A 1984 graduate of Hanford High School, where he was the editor of the newspaper and played varsity tennis, Castro said he and his wife, Mary, feel that moving to Fresno is like "coming home." Castro's mother and sister, a Fresno State alumna, still live in Hanford.

"I won't need a GPS to find Tranquillity or Parlier," said Castro, who has remained connected to the Central Valley throughout his career, including a role as part of founding team of UC Merced. "I know these communities and these people very well. And I look forward to getting to know them even better."

As the first in his family to go to college, Castro, a lifelong educator, has dedicated his entire career to public higher education in California. "When I was at Berkeley, as an undergraduate, it became clear to me how valuable higher education is in our society," said Castro. "Higher education transforms lives."

And he should know. He's the grandson of farmworkers who moved here from Mexico, and his mother supported the family as a beautician. A high school counselor steered him toward UC Berkeley, where Castro received a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's degree in public policy. He earned a doctorate in higher education policy and leadership from Stanford University.

During his 23-year career in public higher education, he has served in leadership positions within the UC system at the Berkeley, Davis, Merced and Santa Barbara campuses and at the Office of the President.

"Joe Castro is an extraordinary leader with great empathy for students," said Mark Yudof, President, University of California. "He will be a superb president at Fresno"

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State.”

According to Mehas, the search committee had a long list of requirements, and Castro met every single one. “We listened well and we were so pleased we found someone that was tailor fit for the Central Valley.”

Selected from more than 60 highly qualified candidates across the country, it was Castro’s “passionate commitment” to serve faculty, staff and students and the people of the Central Valley that drew the search committee to him, Mehas said.

Castro, who will be Fresno State’s first Latino president, said growing up in the Central Valley gives him insight and experience with both the opportunities and challenges of the region.

“I went to school with kids of every background and socioeconomic station,” he said. He noted that his mother “embraced diversity before it was fashionable” and as a result, an appreciation of that diversity was always a part of his fabric.

It is that same diversity that excites him about Fresno State, a place where students from all backgrounds can succeed.

“The fact that Fresno State is a Latino serving institution, designated by the federal government, is one of the reasons I was attracted to Fresno State. There are many reasons I was attracted and that is one of them. I share that background with Latino students. I also share my background of being from the Valley with a lot of students,” Castro said.

“I’m going to be president for everybody. I’m going to work to advance educational opportunities for Latino and all the other students at Fresno State. I’m looking forward to meeting with leaders from all the different communities including Latino community members throughout the valley as I make visits,” he said.

Castro, who wrote his doctoral dissertation at Stanford on university presidents, says he will meet and talk with President John Welty as often as he can, over the next two months. Castro and Welty will work closely together to ensure a smooth transition.

Of Castro, Welty says, "I have known him for many years and he will provide great leadership for Fresno State."

Upon taking the reigns on Aug. 1, Castro said his first order of business will be to listen. "I want to get to know people," says Castro. "I will be listening and learning."

Said Mehas, "The future looks very, very bright."

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