

‘RUNNERS FORWARD 2026



CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
BAKERSFIELD



Our Strategic Intention for CSUB's Future.

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When I was appointed the sixth president of CSUB in 2025, my first priority was the creation of a new strategic plan — a vision for this university that reaffirms our commitment to academic excellence and student success, enunciates our highest aspirations, affirms the student-centered core philosophy that has always guided us and offers a clear blueprint to convert our ambitions into workable solutions to maintain relevance moving forward.

I enlisted the expertise of Dr. Shaylyn Marks, who leads CSUB's Campus Belonging initiatives, to design a process that would democratize the undertaking and ensure that every constituency on our campus, as well as CSUB's alumni, community of supporters and regional leaders, would be integral architects of the five-year plan.

For the better part of a year, our strategic planners have engaged with 1,000-plus members of this campus and region, collecting more than 3,000 stories and focus group insights. The strategic plan team met with people from both the campus and greater community to capture the emotions behind these stories, from pride

and satisfaction to frustration and discouragement. Those conversations were a necessary starting point to achieve a new framework that prioritizes transparency and the inclusion of all voices in our assessment of CSUB today and our construction of what CSUB will become in the future.

To help make sense of the torrent of data, we partnered with TGN Consulting, a respected industry leader in the development of strategic initiatives. The TGN consultants worked with Dr. Marks and our team to gather data and lived experiences, identify common themes and analyze the way our structures work – or don't work – to achieve CSUB's student-focused aims and fulfill our educational mission. In the pages that follow, you will see how we have synthesized our collective voices to create the four strategic pillars that will serve as our framework and guide us in maintaining relevance and continuing to meet the needs of our community as we move into the future.

The new strategic plan is designed to illuminate how we can collectively work together to provide outstanding service and opportunities to our students and community while strengthening the academic enterprise that defines who we are as a university. This statement of vision and values will serve as our north star, guiding us toward strengthened integrated efforts, meaningful collaborative engagement and intentional community support and outreach.

As the president of this beacon of progress, knowledge and job creation in the heart of California, I want to thank everyone who contributed their time, energy and personal experience as a CSUB student, faculty, staff or community member. This plan represents more than words on paper; it captures the wisdom, struggles, aspirations and prescriptions for success of this diverse and growing family of ours and reflects the shared belief that higher education transforms lives and communities.

Dr. Vernon B. Harper Jr.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Our Mission

California State University, Bakersfield is a comprehensive public university offering excellent undergraduate and graduate programs that advance the intellectual and personal development of its students. We emphasize student learning through our commitment to scholarship, ethical behavior, diversity, service, global awareness and lifelong learning. The university collaborates with partners in the community to increase the region's overall educational attainment, enhance its quality of life and support its economic development.

Our Vision

CSUB will be a model for supporting and educating students to become knowledgeable, engaged, innovative and ethical leaders in the regional and global community.

Our Strategic Goal

To produce graduates resilient and adaptable to changing workforce realities by designing a cross-disciplinary, regionally-integrated experience. This requires CSUB to operate as an integrated system - one that is coherent, predictable and responsive to student and community needs.

Our Approach

Out of the set of assets CSUB has today, we can strengthen what we already do well and shore up areas of weakness, by connecting them - academic, operational and regional capabilities - into a cohesive system.

MISSION, VISION & STRATEGIC INTENTION

RECRUIT

Make CSUB everyone's first choice for a degree or a career.

PREPARE

Give everyone tools for success at work and school.

RETAIN

Make CSUB a place everyone wants to stay.

ACHIEVE

Empower everyone to personal success.

RECRUIT

PREPARE

RETAIN

ACHIEVE

The Achievement Pipeline

CSUB maintains a foundation of high-quality academic excellence that offers a cross-disciplinary, regionally-integrated student experience by guiding students through critical phases of transition. Importantly, the experiences of students and CSUB faculty and staff run parallel to one another along the Achievement Pipeline journey.

Why Transitions Matter

The highest risk of fragmentation lies between phases: admitted but not enrolled; enrolled but under-supported; preparing for graduation but disconnected from career pathways; alumni who leave without a durable relationship to the university. These transitions are where students most need a coherent institution. These same transitional phases are also present in the experiences of our faculty and staff. CSUB's personnel go through their own forms of recruitment and job-related preparation, are also benefited by robust retention efforts and achieve professional outcomes that ultimately benefit this community if supported sufficiently.

The Achievement Pipeline gives CSUB a shared frame for seeing those transition points, assigning ownership and designing proactive support before students and personnel experience confusion, delay or disengagement.



Our four pillars will be supported by the strategic foundation of an integrated campus that is deeply rooted in the community and will create success for our students, faculty, staff and region.

Strategic Foundation: Integrate Campus **OPERATIONS** and Community Engagement

STRATEGIC FOUNDATION

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- **Operations Goal 1:**
Maintain institutional integrity to uphold ethical standards, comply with laws, reduce potential liability and maintain stakeholders' trust.
- **Operations Goal 2:**
Ensure CSUB fiscal responsibility by monitoring financial health to ensure long-term stability and responsible stewardship of public resources.
- **Operations Goal 3:**
Advance CSUB's cultivation of public and private support.
- **Operations Goal 4:**
Demonstrate operational excellence and readiness to support the system through shared services and skilled personnel.
- **Operations Goal 5:**
Demonstrate and enhance commitment to advancing academic quality, operational efficiency and leadership development through collaboration, shared services and mutual support across all universities and with the Chancellor's Office.



STRATEGIC PILLARS

Pillar 1:

Increase **RECRUITMENT** and Enrollment Efforts

- **Recruitment Goal 1:**
Increase student recruitment and enrollment efforts to enrich the campus community.
- **Recruitment Goal 2:**
Strengthen student onboarding and advising efforts to provide user-friendly navigation and support.
- **Recruitment Goal 3:**
Expand CSUB partnerships and presence with K-12 school districts and community colleges.
- **Recruitment Goal 4:**
Match recruitment efforts of faculty to align with student, program and regional demands.
- **Recruitment Goal 5:**
Improve faculty early career support and development.
- **Recruitment Goal 6:**
Match recruitment efforts of staff to align with student demands as they intersect with university operations.

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Pillar 2:

PREPARE student, faculty and staff for success

STRATEGIC PILLARS

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- **Preparation Goal 1:**
Support transition to rigorous relevant coursework and programming to close equity gaps.
- **Preparation Goal 2:**
Enhance intentionality to align academic programs with career preparation.
- **Preparation Goal 3:**
Enhance student advising experiences.
- **Preparation Goal 4:**
Implement and scale high-impact practices across CSUB academic courses and programs to close equity gaps.
- **Preparation Goal 5:**
Enhance onboarding process for faculty to cultivate strong scholarly and pedagogical support.
- **Preparation Goal 6:**
Enhance onboarding process for staff that facilitates seamless transitions so that staff can more readily provide student-centered services and support.



Pillar 3:

RETAIN students, faculty and staff

STRATEGIC PILLARS

- **Retention Goal 1:**
Ensure academic offerings align with workforce needs and student demand while maintaining healthy academic programs.
- **Retention Goal 2:**
Provide continuous rigorous and relevant coursework and programming throughout students' educational experience.
- **Retention Goal 3:**
Enhance career readiness and major-to career alignment by providing job-relevant, early and ongoing career experiences.
- **Retention Goal 4:**
Provide culturally responsive and sustaining student programming to cultivate students' sense of belonging.
- **Retention Goal 5:**
Engage students in high-impact opportunities.
- **Retention Goal 6:**
Increase student persistence rates to minimize disruptions towards degree attainment.
- **Retention Goal 7:**
Increase student 2, 4 and 6-year graduation rates.
- **Retention Goal 8:**
Ensure intercollegiate athletic experiences that cultivate a sense of campus and community pride and long-term success.
- **Retention Goal 9:**
Enhance scholarly opportunities for faculty career advancement.
- **Retention Goal 10:**
Provide job-relevant professional development opportunities for faculty and staff.
- **Retention Goal 11:**
Provide clear pathways for faculty and staff job advancement.

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Pillar 4:

ACHIEVE campus success

STRATEGIC PILLARS

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- **Achieve Goal 1:**
Coordinate the student journey across critical transition points to graduation and a meaningful career.
- **Achieve Goal 2:**
Align institutional decisions, resources and accountability to strategic priorities.
- **Achieve Goal 3:**
Build cross-functional capacity to solve strategic challenges.
- **Achieve Goal 4:**
Strengthen institutional learning and knowledge-sharing across campus.
- **Achieve Goal 5:**
Strengthen CSUB's ability to understand and respond to the student experience.
- **Achieve Goal 6:**
Strengthen proactive student support and navigation from admission to graduation and alumni engagement.
- **Achieve Goal 7:**
Strengthen CSUB's ability to identify and respond to regional needs.
- **Achieve Goal 8:**
Strengthen employer and community connections that create visible student opportunity.
- **Achieve Goal 9:**
Extend CSUB's role as a place for lifelong learning and as an alumni mobility partner.

CSU Forward Direction

How 'Runners Forward Advances CSU Forward

Economic Mobility Engine

CSUB's designed student experience will connect recruitment, preparation, retention, employment exposure and preparation so students graduate with clear pathways into professional and civic life.

Sustainable Affordability

CSUB's performance dashboard, workflow redesign and proactive student navigation and communication systems will reduce avoidable friction, delay, duplication and late intervention, all of which positively impact time and cost.

Employer of Choice

CSUB's collaboration systems, 'integrated action teams' and clearer decision rights will create a more coherent environment for faculty and staff to do effective work.

Statewide Impact

CSUB's regional and employer integration operating principle will position the university as Kern County's hub for workforce development, civic life, lifelong alumni development and regional problem-solving.

Student-Centered Experience

CSUB will operate from its Student Achievement Pipeline framework, and employ a student experience listening system to understand student needs and improve the student journey.

Continuous Improvement and Accountability

CSUB's strategy uses phased implementation, performance indicators, feedback loops and student-experience data to learn, adjust and report progress over time.

System-wide Collaboration and Operational Excellence

CSUB will build an Integrated Operations Leadership Council to support coordination across the campus, cross-unit management routines, data governance and institutional performance systems to make collaboration operational.

CSUB'S ROLE IN CSU FORWARD

CSU Forward calls on the California State University system to strengthen its role as California's engine of economic mobility by becoming more student-centered, more coordinated, more accountable and more responsive to the changing needs of California's communities. CSUB's five-year strategy advances that system-wide direction in the context of Bakersfield and Kern County.

This plan translates CSU Forward into campus-level action. Where CSU Forward calls for flexible learning pathways, operational excellence, student success, workforce durability, regional impact and continuous improvement, CSUB's strategy builds the local systems needed to deliver those outcomes: a designed student experience, integrated operations, proactive student navigation, stronger collaboration across campus and durable employer and community partnerships.

PHASE 3 • YEARS 4-5 Institutionalize What Works

FOCUS: The systems and practices established through the strategy are fully embedded into CSUB's ongoing operations. SUCCESS = Reliably deliver a designed student experience, supported by durable partnerships and integrated internal operations.

PHASE 2 • YEARS 2-3 • Test, Learn and Scale New Possibilities

FOCUS: The systems installed in year 1 are turned to address the opportunities that emerged in sensemaking in the community. SUCCESS = Systems are actively used to solve real problems, and institutional behavior and culture begins to shift.

PHASE 1 • YEAR 1 • Install the Core Infrastructure

FOCUS: Establishing the core systems, structures and governance required to support an integrated institution. SUCCESS = Core systems are in place, visible and beginning to guide work.

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