



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Dr. Debra L. Fitzsimons to Retire from South Orange County Community College District

Oct. 11, 2017 – Dr. Debra L. Fitzsimons, interim chancellor of the South Orange County Community College District, has announced that she will retire on December 30. She has served as interim chancellor since July 1, 2016, when the board of trustees appointed her to the position following the retirement of Gary Poertner. Previously, she held the position of vice chancellor of business services beginning in 2011, in which she successfully oversaw the district’s business and financial operations, and managed a budget of over \$800 million and multiple business-related projects and initiatives.

Dr. Fitzsimons stated, “It has been an honor to serve at SOCCCD as both the interim chancellor and vice chancellor of business services. From day one I have been a champion for Saddleback College and Irvine Valley College and have thoroughly enjoyed working with some of the finest people I have ever met in higher education. For some time now I have been making plans to return home to Pennsylvania to be closer to my family, particularly my aging parents. Recent circumstances have made it necessary that I return sooner than I expected. I am saddened to be saying goodbye to my colleagues and an organization that I love, but am confident that I am leaving the district in very good shape due to the concerted efforts of our tremendously talented faculty, staff, and administrators who are so passionate about teaching and supporting all of our students.”

Timothy Jemal, president of the South Orange County Community College District Board of Trustees, stated, “On behalf of the board of trustees, I want to thank Dr. Fitzsimons for stepping up on short notice and proving to be an outstanding leader for our district. Dr. Fitzsimons has led our district through a time of transition and transformation and has been instrumental in advancing the interests of our students, faculty, staff, and community. She has served as a critical change agent and I appreciate the strong partnership she and I developed over the past year and a half. The board will seek a successor to Dr. Fitzsimons who will continue to make the South Orange County Community College District one of the best in the nation.”

Under Dr. Fitzsimons’ leadership, the financial health of the district has been excellent, with no debt service and clean financial audits. She oversaw the development of integrated strategic and resource allocation planning and led efforts to improve district-wide business procedures, including a new human resources and financial system that has established more streamlined, efficient, and user-friendly processes. She has also led the planning and design of the long-awaited stadium at Saddleback College and the Health Center and Concessions/Bleachers Building Project at Irvine Valley College.

Additionally, during Dr. Fitzsimons’ tenure as interim chancellor, accreditation for Saddleback College and Irvine Valley College was reaffirmed, and the district’s first comprehensive Americans with

Disabilities Act transition plan was completed to ensure the campuses are accessible and welcoming to all. The complex development of the Advanced Technology and Education Park at the former Marine Corps Air Station in Tustin has advanced significantly, with Irvine Valley College's first building at the site scheduled to open in January 2018, ongoing planning of the Saddleback College Center for Innovation in Health Care Education, and negotiations for potential public-private partnerships. A merger between KSBR, Saddleback College's radio station, with KCSN at CSU Northridge has made 88.5 FM the largest public radio station in the country, with a reach of 11 million potential listeners and competitive with higher-profile radio stations.

Several new buildings were planned and completed, including the grand openings of the Irvine Valley College Liberal Arts Building and Life Sciences Building, and the Saddleback College Sciences Building. Major renovations included the Irvine Valley College Barranca Parkway entrance and B-100 Building, and the Saddleback College Fine Arts Complex and Learning Resource Center.

Over the last several years, Saddleback College and Irvine Valley College have boasted some of the highest transfer rates in California, and have transferred students to colleges and universities in every state in the nation.

Dr. Fitzsimons added, "I love Saddleback and Irvine Valley College and will miss being a part of our South Orange County Community College District family. I am proud of our commitment to our students and community. You will always be in my mind and heart."

The board of trustees will select an acting chancellor to lead the transition following the retirement of Dr. Fitzsimons and will begin the search for a permanent chancellor with the goal of having someone in place by the summer of 2018.

South Orange County Community College District serves more than 60,000 students per year through our two colleges, Saddleback College and Irvine Valley College. The district serves nearly one million residents and employs more than 3,000 faculty and staff.

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