CEO Tenure and Retention Study

6th update

January 2011 – December 2012

Background

The CEO Tenure and Retention Study of the California Community College League of California (the League) was inaugurated in 1996 upon recognition that, in Spring 1995, the chancellor positions at Chabot-Las Positas, Contra Costa, Foothill-DeAnza, Los Angeles, Los Rios and San Francisco Community College Districts were either vacant or about to be vacated. In addition, the leadership of the board of the Chief Executive Officers of California Community Colleges (CEOs) noted that an estimated 47 of 129 CEO positions (chancellors, superintendent/presidents and presidents) in the CCC system left their positions between July 1, 1994 and April 21, 1995. In response to this information, the California Community College Trustees (Trustees) board of the League held a mini-retreat in January 1996 to discuss these concerns with a panel comprised of a new CEO (Tim Dong), a long-experienced CEO (George Boggs), and a CEO who moved from a presidency to a chancellorship (Jeanne Atherton), and moderated by Jack Randall (a retired CEO). As a result of these discussions, the CCCT board initiated several activities including a staff study to determine the extent of the turnover problem and its possible consequences, with a goal to improve the recruitment and retention of effective CEOs at all levels.

Since 1996, the League has published a periodic report on turnover and retention, with additional information on the gender and ethnicity of CEOs and, when possible, compared these percentages to the national composition of community college CEOs. Following is the sixth update which encompasses the years 2011 and 2012 and includes data on CEOs who report to a board and those who report to a chancellor; ethnicity and gender of California community college CEOs compared with national community college CEOs; and some conclusions and thoughts, given the eighteen-year history of this study.

Summary of 2011 and 2012 Data

The sixth review of data on the retention and tenure (i.e., length of service) of California Community College CEOs which includes chancellors and superintendent/presidents as well as presidents in multi-campus districts indicates that:

For chancellors and superintendent/presidents:

• The tenure length of chancellors and superintendent/presidents (5.1 in 2011 and 4.6 in 2012) would place the tenure length for these years slightly lower than the mean (5.3 for the first sixteen years of this study for California community college CEOs who report to boards).

• During the years 2011 and 2012, thirteen of these CEOs (nine in 2011 and four in 2012) retired. This continues the prior years' pattern which has averaged seven retirements annually from this group of CEOs.

• The movement of CEOs out of state – which was a concern when this study was first conducted in 1995-96 – has virtually been reversed. Only three chancellors or superintendent/presidents left California to take a position in another state during 2011-12: all three had come into California for their sole California position from another state. In one case, in particular, the CEO indicated that she was leaving due to a special opportunity to serve as a CEO in her "home" community back East.

Of the remaining CEOs who came from another state and left their positions in either 2011 or 2012, two retired while two others left "under fire."

• Of the 28 district-level CEOs who left their positions in 2011 or 2012, five (18%) left "under fire," i.e., because they were removed in mid-contract or were notified that their contract would not be renewed. While this is a relatively high percentage, it is below the 32% rate of CEOs who left under fire during two years of the previous four-year period. This is positive in that districts and their CEOs were still under major budgetary pressures during 2011 and 2012 due to lack of cost-of-living adjustment or growth funding as well as major cuts to many other funding categories and, as the recession continued, CEOs were forced to make increasingly more difficult cuts while serving their local communities as well as possible.

For presidents in multi-campus districts:

•The tenure and retention length for these CEOs in 2011 was 4.2 years; in 2012, it was 4.3 years. These data repeat a continuing pattern of shorter tenures for these positions than for district-level CEOs because these CEOs are strong candidates for district-level positions and they are frequently chosen to fill those vacancies.

• During these years, the predominant reason for leaving (15 out of 25 who changed positions) was retirement; six took higher positions in California and four left for out-of-state positions. No CEO in one of these positions left "under fire" in these two years.

Ethnicity of CEOs

Since this study was first conducted, California has always employed a greater percentage of women and ethnic minorities as CEOs than the national average for community colleges. One reason, of course, is the greater diversity of the population in California which means that there are likely to be more non-male and non-white qualified candidates available than in the average state outside of California. The difficulty, though, is in determining the percentage of persons with an advanced degree (Ph.D. in education or a related field or Ed.D) by ethnicity to assess whether these greater percentages represent equity or simply the greater diversity of the state.

The following table provides a comparison of the racial/ethnic distribution of California Community College CEOs compared with national data on community college CEOs.

Community College CEOs --Ethnicity (%) California Community College vs National CC Data, 2012		
	California	National[1]
African American, non-Hispanic	13	8
American Indian/Alaska Native	0	3
Asian American/Pacific Islander	7	1
Caucasian	63	81
Latino/Hispanic	17	6
Unknown/Other	0	4

Gender of California Community College CEOs

Gender equality among CEOs in California's community colleges has continued to consistently outpace gender equality among community college CEOs across the country. However, the percentage of female community college CEOs in California has remained stagnant since reaching the level of 41.6% in 2002, while the national percentage of Ed.D. or Ph.D recipients who are female had increased to 67% of the doctoral degrees in education by 2010.[2] As these young doctorate-holding women mature and gain more experience, it is likely that their percentage in CEO positions will increase until they lead and serve California's community colleges in the same proportion as degrees received.

Community College CEOs by Gender, California vs. National Data, 2012[3]

	California	National
Female	42%	28%
Male	58%	72%

[1] http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/Trends/Pages/ceocharacteristics.aspx

[2] http://chronicle.com/article/In-Terms-of-Gender/135304/

[3] http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/Trends/Pages/ceocharacteristics.aspx

Conclusions

With the collection and analysis of eighteen years of data, the trends for California vs the nation seem fairly consistent, as follows:

• The tenure for CEOs reporting to a board (i.e., CCC chancellors and superintendent/presidents) ranges from a low of 4.4 to a high of 6.7 years with a mean of 5.3 over the first sixteen years vs. 5.1 in 2011 and 4.6 years in 2012. This compares with a national median of five years and a mean of seven years for community college CEOs in 2012. Throughout the years of this study, the tenure of California community college CEOs has consistently ranged approximately two years lower than the national average, and both numbers have been dropping in concert. We hypothesize that this is due to the complexity and challenge of the position as well as the continuing broad missions of community colleges in California.

• Most individuals who are hired as CEOs in California have previously served as a vice president/vice chancellor of academic affairs or as a CEO in either California or another state. This reflects the recognition of search committees and trustees that those holding CEO positions must have extensive knowledge of the inner workings of collegiate structures and policies.

• This study has not surveyed the ages or retirement plans of CEOs but it is clear that increasing numbers of California Community College CEOs continue to retire, in percentages similar to national figures. Estimates (Aspen Institute) are that more than 40 percent of the nation's 1,200 community college presidents are likely to retire in the next five years; and AACC data indicates that about 75 percent of community college CEOS participating in their survey plan to retire within the next ten years, with another fifteen percent expecting to retire in 11 – 15 years. There is no reason to expect that California will not follow suit, given the continuing retirements that we have witnessed since the initiation of this ongoing study.

• Because the job is so challenging, institutions may prefer older leaders with proven track records which currently may work to the disadvantage of younger leaders, women, and minorities. On the other hand, while the anticipated mass retirements of the Baby Boom generation may present a challenge or even a temporary shortage of leadership, it also presents an opportunity to further diversify the leadership of California's community colleges.

• The initial concerns of the League boards that candidates from other states would not accept employment in California generally seem to be unfounded. There is a continuing in-flow of new CEOs from other states; the majority of out-of-state CEOs who enter California tend to remain and are as successful as those whose entire career has been spent in California.

• The pattern of movement of CEOs indicates that, in seeking a new position, they tend to migrate away from rural districts toward larger, higher-paying districts in urban and suburban locations. Similarly, presidents in California's multi-campus districts frequently leave to take a position as a superintendent/president or a chancellor and report directly to a board of trustees. This continues to be a common pattern as trustee boards seek experienced CEOs who have been successful elsewhere. A second common path to the presidency is holding the position of vice chancellor/vice president of academic affairs or a related field.

• Due to the significant cuts faced by community colleges across the country, a hypothesis has been forwarded that the fiscal demands on CEOs may encourage boards to hire chief business officers, with strong fiscal backgrounds, as their next CEO. That hypothesis has not been borne out to date in California, although it is a possible future response to the complexity and fiscal realities of administering a college today.

Looking toward the Future

The general consensus among policy analysts and researchers is that there are many new and continuing challenges to leading a community college. These challenges include fiscal cuts; greater accountability requirements; stronger accreditation expectations; and greater diversity of students by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and readiness for college-level work. These challenges will require a broad range of skills which can be acquired through a variety of activities including: on-the-job experience, doctoral education, mentoring, networking, and ongoing professional development throughout one's career.

In the course of gaining these skills, future community college CEOs will need to be more resourceful, fiscally experienced, technologically knowledgeable, ready to collaborate in governance, flexible, and ready to adapt to new circumstances than have previous presidents. They also will have to be prepared for the challenges of competition from non-profit, for-profit, and online institutions which seek to enroll students who formerly would have attended community college.

While forthcoming retirements – estimated by the Aspen Institute as 40% of community college presidents across the country in the next five years -- continue to be a source of concern, there is also a bright spot since this will provide the opportunity for boards to hire candidates from more diverse backgrounds so that our college administration will mirror more closely the backgrounds of our students.

References

Aspen Institute and Achieving the Dream. *Crisis and Opportunity: Aligning the Community College Presidency with Student Success*. June 2013. www.aspenisntitute.org/cep

Chronicle of Higher Education. *Doctorates Earned by Minority-Group Members and Women, by Discipline, 2009*. September 25, 2011.

Cook, Bryan J. 2012. *The American College President Study: Key Findings and Takeaways*. American Council on Education. 2012

Fain, Paul. Who Will Lead Community Colleges? *Inside Higher Education*. June 21, 2013.

Grissom, Jason A., and Stephanie Andersen. Why Superintendents Turn Over. 2013. Forthcoming, *American Education Research Journal*.

Inside Higher Education. *The 2012 Inside Higher Education Survey of College and University Presidents*. 2012

Konovalov, Patricia, and Roberta C. Teahen. Community College Presidents: What Does It Take? *(Leadership Abstracts).* Volume 26, No. 6. June 2013.

Lipka, Sara. New Chiefs of 2-Year Colleges Must Meet Revenue and Innovation Challenges. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. April 12, 2013.

Tekle, Rahel. Compensation and Benefits of Community College CEOs: 2012. *American Association of Community Colleges*. 2012.

Times Staff. Most Community College CEOs to Retire within a Decade. *Community College Daily*. American Association of Community Colleges. November 13, 2012.