CEO Tenure and Retention Study

4th Update

January 2003 – December 2006

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Summary

The fourth review of data on the retention and tenure (i.e., length of service) of California Community College district CEOs (which includes chancellors and superintendent/presidents and presidents in multi-campus districts) reveals the following:

For chancellors and superintendent/presidents:

- Length of service levels have dropped from their high point (5.5 years in 2002) to the low point (4.5 years in 2005) which is almost as low as the level (4.4 years) of the initial study years of 1995 and 1996.
- The annual turnover rates were below the national average until 2001 when increasing numbers of CEOs began to retire and the average turnover increased greatly; the high turnover rates continue to be largely (43 – 70% depending on the year) due to retirements, mostly of long-time CEOs.
- The movement of CEOs out of state has continued to remain quite low, with most CEOs leaving the state primarily when they retire and most often to return to their home state.
- Retirement of a significant number of long-time district CEOs continues in earnest, with CEOs regularly announcing their expected retirement up to a full year in advance to allow their boards time to find a suitable replacement. In fact, as the new school/fiscal year began in August, League staff were already aware of eight long-time CEOs – with an tenure of 7.8 years of service in their final assignments – who had indicated that they would retire by July 2008.
- The percentage of CEOs who have left "under fire" has also been growing (20% in the years 2003-06) as CEOs experience greater pressures and stresses as well as new challenges.

For college-level presidents:

- The length of service for college presidents in multi-campus districts continues to decline with tenure by 2006 at its lowest level to date (3.0 years).
- The primary reason for turnover (51% over the four-year period of 2003-2006) is acceptance of a higher position (usually as a district-level CEO). However, the number (9 out of 41) of these presidents retiring is also greater than in earlier years, so the turnover rate of experienced college-level presidents is even greater than that of experienced district-level CEOs.

Data for District CEOs

Annual Turnover Rate – The annual number of district CEOs leaving their position in any given year has fluctuated substantially over the life of this study (1984 – 2006), from a low of four per year (1997) to a high of 14 (in 1978 and 2002). For comparison, during the period of this update, the annual turnover numbers were 12 (2003), 10 (2004), 6 (2005), and 11 (2006) with respective turnover rates of 17.6%, 14.5%, 9.0%, and 15.5% for a 4-year average turnover rate of 14.2%. (See Table I)

The five-year average turnover rate for 2001- 2005 is 15.3% which is slightly higher than the previous five-year average interval of 14.7% for the intervals 1976-1980 through 1996 – 2000.

Length of Service – The latest four years of California data (2003-2006) reveal an average tenure length of 4.8 years for community college chancellors and superintendent/presidents, compared with the national tenure average of seven years (Vaughan, 2006) for community college chief executive officers. While the tenure length of 4.8 years is less than that reported (5.5 years) in our last report (which provided data through 2002), it still remains above the level (4.4 years) of the initial study years of 1985-96. However, it also should be noted that the 2005 tenure length dropped once again to 4.5 years, the low level which led the League to begin this serial study in 1995-96. (See Table II)

Reasons for Leaving – The data for 2003-06 reveal clearly that the primary reason for district-level CEOs' leaving (49%) was retirement, reflecting the aging of the "baby boom" generation. In addition, eight of 39 leavers (20.5%) did so "under pressure" and only 2 of the 39 (5.1%) left to assume an out-of-state position. (This latter figure is important because an unusually high number of chancellors and superintendent/presidents left their positions to take out-of-state positions in the first years of this study, which led many to conclude that California standards and mandates were a primary problem.)

Data for Presidents of Community Colleges in Multi-Campus Districts

Annual Turnover Rate – The data on turnover rate show that presidents in multi-campus districts are changing positions at a more rapid rate than chancellors and superintendent/presidents. Specifically, the turnover rates for the last four years for presidents have been: 17.2% (2003); 20.0% (2004); 20.0% (2005); and 15.8% (2006) for a four-year average of 18.3% (compared with 14.2% for the district CEOs). (See Table III)

Length of Service – Largely because of the phenomenon of campus presidents moving up to district positions, the turnover of these presidents was even faster than that of district CEOs, thus significantly decreasing the average length of service over the life of this update. Whereas district CEOs had an average tenure of 4.9 years in their final position during the period from 2003 through 2006, the average for campus presidents' tenure for those same years was 3.7 years. The evidence indicates that the tenure of campus presidents continues to decline, with the data showing that the tenure of campus presidents for the years 2003 – 2006 was 4.2, 4.1, 3.3 and finally 3.0 years, respectively, in their last campus-level position (See Table IV).

Reasons for Leaving – A general review of the data for presidents of colleges in multi-campus districts over the past four years indicates a different, but complementary, pattern from that displayed by district CEOs. While the mode for district CEOs leaving is retirement, the mode for presidents of colleges in multi-campus districts is clearly moving up to a district position. (This was true in each of the past four years except 2006 when more campus presidents retired than moved up to a district position.) And the position that the campus president typically moved to was most likely vacated by a retiring CEO rather than one who left for a position in a larger district.

Gender and Ethnicity

California data continue to reveal that California compares favorably with national averages on the percentages of women and ethnic minorities in CEO positions. The combined data – including presidents in multi-campus districts and CEOs reporting to boards – are as follows:

Ethnicity for California CEOs vs. National Average, 2005

	CA[1]	National[2]
African-American	13.3%	5.9%
Asian American or Pacific Islander	5.2	1.1
Latino/Latina	20.0	4.2
Unknown	3.8	–
American Indian	–	0.9
Caucasian	57.7	87.5

Although California is doing well (42.3%) compared to national averages (12.5%) in the percentage of non-Anglos serving as community college CEOs, it has only slightly improved in hiring a more ethnically-diverse group of CEOs. In 1997, 40% of 135 California CEOs were non-Anglo, compared with 35% in 2002, and 42% in 2005.

Gender Among California Community College CEOs – Community colleges in California have continued to have substantial percentages of female CEOs, although the percentages are not growing as quickly as the pace of increased diversity over the last twenty years. Whereas in 2002, 41.6% of CEOs were female, that percentage had slightly dropped to 40% by 2005 (based on League staff determination using the annual California Community College Directory, 2005). The comparative figure for the national study was 29% of community college presidents were female in 2005, compared with 28% in 2001.

Conclusions

Review of these data indicates that there are some significant challenges ahead for California community colleges in filling CEO ranks. The data clearly reveal at least three trends:

1. Approximately 50% of CEOs who leave their positions are retiring.
2. More CEOs than the past average are leaving "under duress" – including some listed as retiring who would have stayed longer if they had not experienced what some have described as board involvement in day-to-day district operations or excessive pressures from others within the institution.
3. Trustees are tending to seek new CEOs from the ranks of those who are college presidents in multi-campus districts, thus creating two vacancies (the district CEO position as well as the local presidency) which exacerbates the increase in turnover rates.

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[1] California data are based on League staff determination using the annual California Community College Directory, 2005.

[2] National data reflect the presentation, "Community College Presidents: A Current Profile," George B. Vaughan and Kent A. Phillippe, 86th Annual AACC Convention, April 23, 2006.

League Responses

One of the major goals of the Community College League of California is to "provide leadership in the education and development of community college governing board members, chief executive officers and staff to ensure the continued strength, diversity, vitality and effectiveness of the colleges' educational programs and services." As staff have viewed the continual turnover of CEOs including the stresses and changing challenges of the position, the League has adopted a number of initiatives to accomplish its leadership mission of providing assistance and support to our chief executive officers. These include:

1. The League sponsored and staffed a biannual "Vineyard Symposium" to provide chief executive officers with a professional development opportunity tailored to the California Community College leadership experience, with primary support provided by the Napa Valley College president and consultants.
2. League staff developed an executive coaching program and other services for new CEOs, including one-on-one technical assistance. Staff personally mentor and coach new CEOs and identify experienced California Community College CEOs to work with their new colleagues. In addition, the League's annual convention includes a seminar conducted by one of our emeritus CEOs for new CEOs entitled, "Workshop for New CEOs."
3. The League provides technical assistance and consulting services to CEOs through the "League on Call" (LOC) or through League staff visitations. The League on Call Consulting Service provides consultants to member-districts on a variety of topics including "boardsmanship" and other topics upon request. The League CEO/president continues to provide sessions (upon request and with the assistance of the president of the Academic Senate of the CCCs) on local decisionmaking, and other topics, with twenty community college districts receiving consultations from LOC during 2006-07.
4. As part of the League's response to issues of leadership development and succession, League staff have engaged in regular on-going collaboration with the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), the Community College Leadership Development Initiative (CCLDI) operating out of the University of San Diego (with the League CEO serving on its board), and the Association for California Community College Administrators (ACCCA) on ways these organizations can support one another's efforts in this critical area.
5. In 2005, the League took over primary sponsorship of the Asilomar Leadership Skills Seminar (ALSS -- which began in 1984 and was created by leaders of the American Association of Women in Community Colleges and the Yosemite Community College District.) This seminar is an intensive four-day experience that focuses on issues facing women who have made a commitment to community college administration. Its purpose is to provide information, strategies, contacts and opportunities for personal and professional growth. The expected outcome is that participants will be able to acquire and successfully accept expanded leadership responsibilities within their own or other California community colleges.

   The presentation and discussions at the ALSS cover key leadership issues and skills, including: emotional intelligence, budgeting and finance, cultural proficiency leading change, leadership and ethics, finding balance, campus politics, career choices and paths, governance, applications and interviews.

   The Seminar particularly welcomes women of color and those representing colleges which have not been previously represented at the seminar.

6. In 2007, the League initiated a leadership development institute entitled, A Leadership Choice: Making the Move from Faculty to Administration. It is designed for faculty who are considering an administrative career move and covers the skills and knowledge needed to be a successful administrator, as well as the challenges and joys of administration. It is co-sponsored by CCLDI which may possibly assume the key role for on-going, bi-annual seminars.
7. In addition to the above activities, the League has developed and regularly updates an extensive set of resource materials for new and continuing CEOs including many which are sent to new CEOs along with an extensive "welcome" letter. These include:
    - *Resources for CEOs*, updated annually;
    - *Questions and Answers for New CEOs* on organizational structure, local decision–making, establishing priorities and board/CEO relations;
    - *Different Jobs Different Tasks: Board and CEO Roles*;
    - *"No Confidence" Vvotes: Analysis and Response*;
    - CEO Search;
    - CEO Evaluation; and
    - *Board Focus*, an annual periodical.

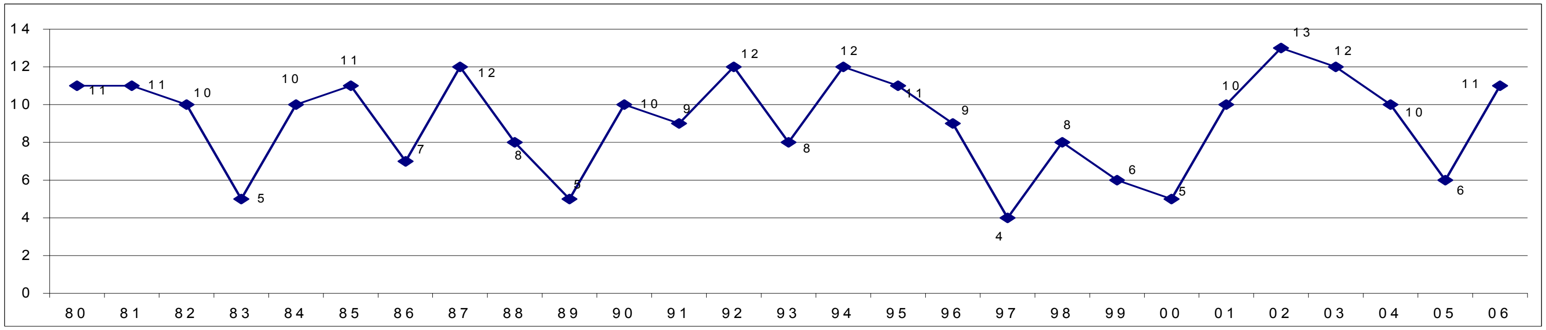
Table I

California Community College District CEOs

Number Leaving by Year

1980 - 2006

(excluding interims)



District CEOs Leaving by Five Year Intervals

Years	Average Number Leaving	Average Percent Leaving
1976-1980	8.8	12.4
1981-1985	9.4	13.2
1986-1990	8.4	11.8
1991-1995	10.4	14.6
1996-2000	6.4	9.0
2001-2005	10.2	14.9
Average of Five Year Intervals	8.9	12.7
2006	11.0	15.5

71 California community college districts through 1999

(51 CEOs from single college districts and 20 CEOs from multi-college districts)

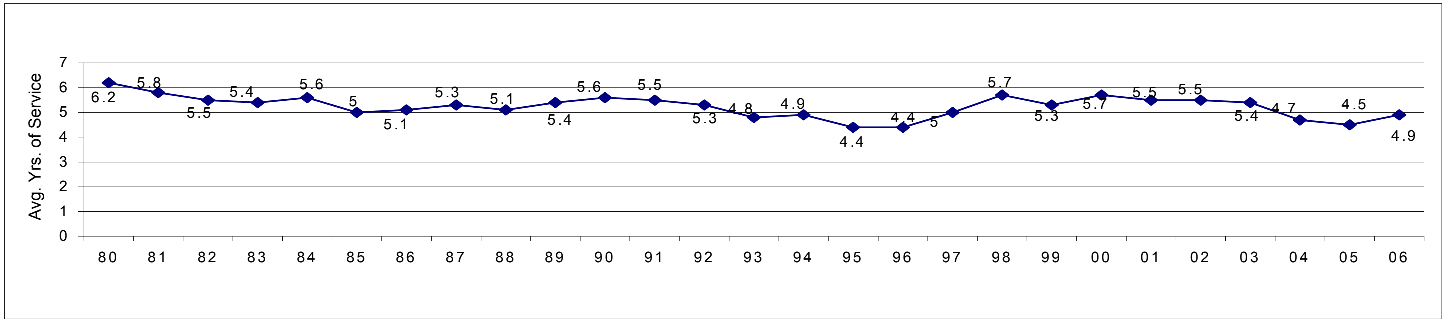
72 California community college districts as of 2000

(52 CEOs from single college districts and 20 CEOs from multi-college districts)

Table II

Analysis of California Community College District CEOs

Mean Number of Years of Service
1980-2006
(excluding interims)



Mean Number of Years of Service for District CEOs by Five Year Intervals

Mean 1976 through 1980 = 6.4
Mean 1981 through 1985 = 5.5
Mean 1986 through 1990 = 5.3
Mean 1991 through 1995 = 5.0
Mean 1996 through 2000 = 5.2
Mean 2001 through 2005 = 5.1

Mean 1980 through 2005 = 5.4

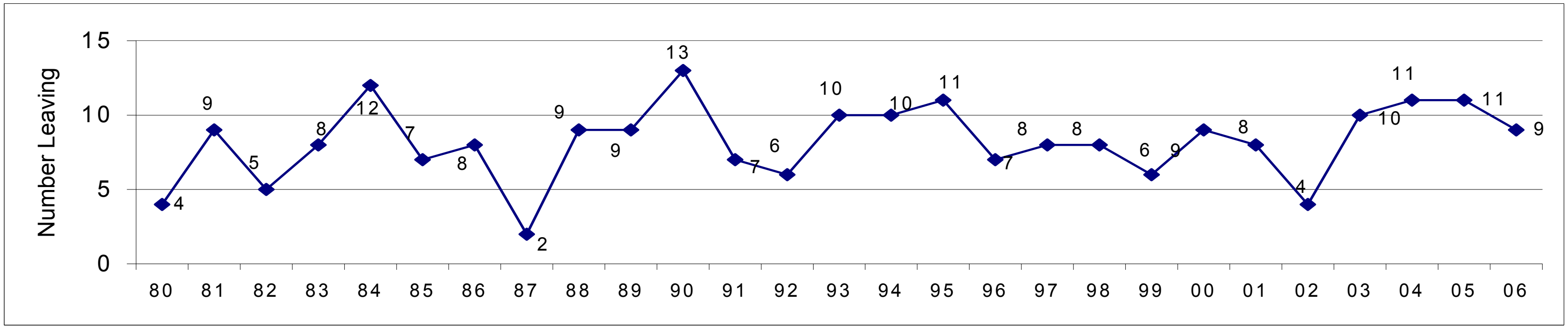
Mean 2006 = 4.9

71 California community college districts through 1999
(51 CEOs from single college districts and 20 CEOs from multi-college districts)
72 California community college districts as of 2000
(52 CEOs from single college districts and 20 CEOs from multi-college districts)

TABLE III

ANALYSIS OF CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS IN MULTI-COLLEGE DISTRICTS

Number Leaving by Year
1980 – 2006
(*excluding interims*)



Presidents in Multi-College Districts Leaving by Five Year Intervals

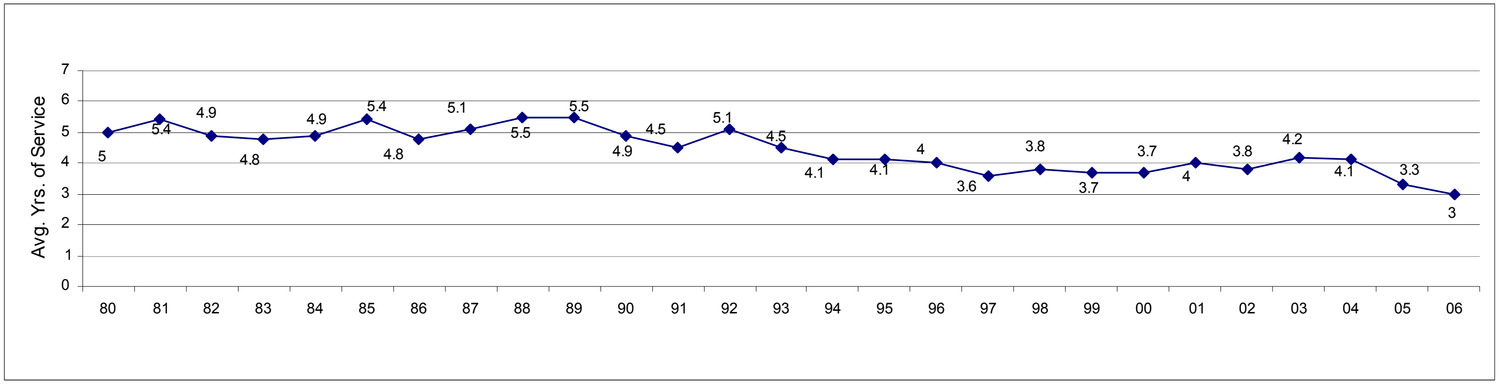
Years	Average Number Leaving	Average Percent Leaving
1976-80	7.2	13.3%
1981-85	8.2	15.0%
1986-90	8.2	15.2%
1991-95	8.8	16.3%
1996-00	7.6	13.8%
2001-05	8.8	15.8%
Average of Five Year Intervals	8.1	14.9%
Average 2006	9.0	15.8%

The denominator for determining the percentage leaving differs as colleges have been added (q.v., Los Positas in 1990, Santiago Canyon in 1997 and Woodland in 2006) or returned to center status (Indian Valley in 1984 and Compton in 2006).

Table IV

Analysis of California Community College Presidents In Multi-college Districts

Mean Number of Years of Service by Five Year Intervals
1980 - 2006
(excluding interims)



Mean Number of Years of Service for Presidents In Multi-college Districts by Five Year Intervals

Mean 1976 through 1980 = 4.4
Mean 1981 through 1985 = 4.7
Mean 1986 through 1990 = 4.9
Mean 1991 through 1995 = 4.7
Mean 1996 through 2000 = 3.8
Mean 2001 through 2005 = 3.9

Mean 1976 through 2005 = 4.4

2006 = 3.0

The denominator for determining the average length of term for CEOs (presidents) in multi-college districts varies by year as colleges have been added (q.v., Los Positas in 1990, Santiago Canyon in 1997 and Woodland in 2006) or returned to center status (Indian Valley in 1984 and Compton in 2006).