



CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

# CEO Tenure & Retention Study

*11<sup>th</sup> Update*

December 2024



COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE LEAGUE  
OF CALIFORNIA



## ***CEO Tenure & Retention Study***

© Community College League of California

2017 O Street / Sacramento, CA 95811

Phone: (916) 444-8641 / Fax: (916) 444-2954

Web: [www.ccleague.org](http://www.ccleague.org)

**CONTRIBUTORS:** Larry Galizio, Ph.D., President & CEO, Community College League of California; Nune Garipian, Senior Policy Advocate, Community College League of California; Andrew Martinez, Senior Director of Government Relations, Community College League of California; Kristal Padilla, Legislative Advocate, Community College League of California; Lori Bachand, Senior Director of Communications, Community College League of California; Brent Johnson, Director of Analytics, Analytica Consulting, Sophia Sha, Senior Consultant, Analytica Consulting.

**RECORD MANAGEMENT:** Rina Kasim, Government Relations & Administrative Coordinator, Community College League of California

**DASHBOARD DESIGN:** Analytica Consulting

A special thank you to Dr. Rita Mize, the initial author of the CEO Tenure & Retention Report, and Yolanda Avalos, Lizette Navarette, and Rina Kasim, caretakers of over 100 years of CEO tenure and retention data and analysis.

For more information on CEO Tenure & Retention, or questions regarding this publication, please contact League Staff at [cclc@ccleague.org](mailto:cclc@ccleague.org).

© Community College League of California  
Published December 2024



Find this report and  
CEO Tenure & Retention datasets at  
[https://www.ccleague.org/resources/  
ceo-tenure-retention-dashboard/](https://www.ccleague.org/resources/ceo-tenure-retention-dashboard/)

# Contents



Introduction and Terms . . . . .	5
Background and Methodology . . . . .	6
By the Numbers: A Decade of Change (2014-2024) . . .	7
Why CEO Tenure and Retention Matter. . . . .	9
Notable Findings . . . . .	12
Diversity Snapshot . . . . .	14
Women and the CEO Gender Gap. .	16
Recommendations . . . . .	19
Closing Observations . . . . .	20
Dedication . . . . .	21
References . . . . .	22



# SPECIAL THANKS

We extend our appreciation to the Board of Directors of the Community College League of California.



**Roger Schultz, Ph.D.**  
*Mt. San Jacinto College*



**Nan Gomez-Heitzeberg**  
*Kern CCD*



**Deborah Knowles**  
*Sacramento City College*



**Julianna Barnes**  
*South Orange County CCD*



**Suzanne Lee Chan**  
*Ohlone CCD*



**Sunita Cooke**  
*MiraCosta College CCD*



**Willy Duncan**  
*Sierra College CCD*



**Barbara Dunsheath**  
*North Orange County CCD*



**Amparo Medina**  
*Oxnard College*



**Andra Hoffman**  
*Los Angeles CCD*



**Char Perlas**  
*Siskiyou CCD*



**Loren Steck**  
*Monterey Peninsula CCD*

# INTRODUCTION

This 11<sup>th</sup> update of the Community College League of California's (CCLC) biennial Tenure and Retention Report includes late summer/early fall 2022 to July 31, 2024. This period witnessed perennial California CEO challenges: economic volatility, burdensome laws and regulations, dysfunctional boards of trustees, State legislative and policymaker dynamics, and uncertain and inadequate funding. CEOs also experienced the selection of a new State Chancellor, Dr. Sonya Christian, continued enrollment and remote work challenges primarily resulting from the pandemic, and a host of initiatives, mandates, and reporting requirements from the Chancellor's Office and policymakers in Sacramento and Washington, D.C.

Illustrative of the State budget's volatility, districts experienced a 6.56 percent cost of living increase (COLA) in 2022-23, an 8.13 percent COLA in 2023-24, and 1.07 percent COLA for fiscal year 2024-25. Governor Newsom's January 2024 budget sought to confront a \$37.9 billion deficit and employed more than \$500 million in one-time dollars to pay for ongoing State spending. In brief, California community colleges have gone from record State budget increases to State budget shortfalls necessitating the use of State reserves, one-time funds covering ongoing commitments, and the prospect of lean economic times in the forthcoming years. The November 2024 election and the uncertainty in federal direction only adds to the pressures on district chancellors and college presidents and the entire campus climate.

While during the creation of this report, some districts have been experiencing enrollment growth, there remain several districts with more stubborn post-pandemic enrollment numbers. This uneven statewide enrollment has exacerbated Student-Centered Funding Formula (SCFF) per-student funding disparities with rapidly growing districts (primarily in the Inland Empire) earning comparatively lower or non-existent per-FTEs State funding. Simultaneously, the State is pressing districts to substantially increase their high school dual enrollment populations. This contradiction has forced some CEOs to either frustrate and disappoint local high school constituencies or continue to absorb unfunded FTEs. (Recently chaptered Senate Bill 1244 (D-Newman) mandates that district colleges permit districts outside their service area to enter into CCAP agreements should the local district refuse to amend an existing agreement or fail to respond to such a request within 60 days, thus adding another layer of complexity and competition).

Fraudulent enrollments in the thousands have forced some districts and colleges to expend considerable personnel time and resources to combat this very disruptive set of issues. This serves as a reminder that technologies often create unanticipated consequences for institutions employing them.

The aforementioned issues are not a comprehensive listing of the myriad challenges and opportunities confronting California community colleges and their leadership; however, it represents a sampling of prevalent issues during the two-year period beginning late summer/early fall of 2022.

## TERMS

We employ titles *chief executive officer* (CEO) and *president* generically and interchangeably to identify the top executive of a district or college which includes chancellors, superintendents/presidents, and campus presidents. CEO titles vary by institution depending on size and status as a single- or multi-college district. We use *tenure* to describe the length of service of a CEO, and most decidedly is not a reference to employment security or continuous appointment (as is demonstrated by the evidence presented in the report).

# BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

The impetus for the League's biennial CEO Tenure and Retention Study occurred in Spring 1995, as the chancellor positions at large, multi-college districts, including Chabot-Las Positas, Contra Costa, Foothill-De Anza, Los Rios, and San Francisco were either vacant or about to become so. The Chief Executive Officers of the California Community Colleges (CEOCCC) Board noted that many CEO positions in the state had turned over between July 1, 1994, and April 21, 1995. In response, the California Community College Trustees (CCCT) Board discussed these concerns with a panel of experts, including Tim Dong, a new CEO from MiraCosta College; George Boggs, a veteran CEO from Palomar College; and Jeanne Atherton, a CEO who had moved from a presidency to a chancellorship at Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College District. What emerged was the CCCT Board's initiation of a League study to determine the extent and consequences of CEO turnover, with the prospect of improving recruitment and retention efforts of effective CEOs within the California community colleges.

For the initial study in 1995, League staff gathered historical and survey information concerning CEOs from the founding of each district and college. Data from the League's annual directory and newly collected survey results were entered in a database and sent to every CEO to verify their accuracy. The responses were forwarded to a group of experienced, active CEOs who provided their assessment of the reasons for each of the CEO's respective departures. The results were analyzed to determine the number of CEOs exiting their positions annually as well as the length of their tenure.

Since the inaugural study 29 years ago, the League regularly contacts districts, monitors news releases, tracks retirement notices, and reviews local board announcements for CEO changes statewide. As part of this effort, the League has kept track of CEO names, start and end dates, gender, and since 2014, race and ethnicity. With continuing local and even national interest in CEO retention, the League has issued a biennial update of this study since 1995 while maintaining a comprehensive database of names and dates of employment for every California community college CEO from each district and college.

The 11<sup>th</sup> biennial Community College League of California's (League) CEO Tenure and Retention Study for California Community Colleges (CCC) includes data from our updated companion CEO Tenure and Retention Dashboard available on the [League's website](#).



# BY THE NUMBERS: A DECADE OF CHANGE (2014-2024)

As an addendum to this update, we include data from the past decade with the goal of providing additional context for CEO tenure and retention in California community colleges. During this period, both Clovis and Madera Community Colleges were established in 2015, and the all-online institution, Calbright College, emerged in 2019.

As of August 1, 2024, of the 139 working CEOs in California community colleges, only eight (less than six percent) have held the position for 10 years or more [see Table A, page 8]. Seventy-five percent of the eight with more than a decade in the seat are superintendent/presidents. No sitting college president in a multi-college district has served 10 years or more.

In the past decade, we have witnessed the retirement of 27 California chancellors and superintendent/presidents serving their respective institutions for at least 10 years in their final leadership role [see Table B, page 13]. Of those individuals, five held the position of CEO for over 20 years combined, with San Diego Community College District Chancellor Emerita Constance Carroll serving the longest as a CCC CEO — at multiple intuitions — at 43 years. Of those 27 academic leaders, five returned as interim CEOs at a different college or district until a permanent replacement was selected.

Of the 27 districts and colleges experiencing CEO retirements over the last decade, nine are located in Northern California, three in Central California (specifically West Hills, Lemoore, and Porterville), and 15 in Southern California. Seventeen are multi-college districts while 10 are single-college entities.

Since 2014, 153 individuals have taken on the role of first-time permanent CEO at a college or district. A total of 55 executive leaders from within the district, 71 from outside the district, and 14 from other states were promoted to the position of permanent CEO. The rest are executive leaders from organizations that support higher education and other educational institutions.



# BY THE NUMBERS: A DECADE OF CHANGE (2014-2024)



## TABLE A: LONGEST-TENURED CURRENT CEOS

Out of the 139 current CEOs, 8 individuals have held the position for 10 years and more during the current data review period, 2022-2024

College/District	Name	Tenure Duration	Tenure Start
Allan Hancock	S/P Kevin Walthers	11 Years	Started July 2013
Chaffey	S/P Henry Shannon	17 Years	Started September 2007
Compton	President/CEO Keith Curry	13.5 Years	Started March 2011*
Feather River	S/P Kevin Trutna	11.5 Years	Started February 2013
Los Angeles CCD	Ch. Francisco Rodriguez	10 Years	Started June 2014**
Los Rios CCD	Ch. Brian King	11.5 Years	Started February 2013
Mt. San Jacinto	S/P Roger Schultz	16 Years	Started June 2008
Santa Clarita	Ch. Dianne Van Hook	36 Years	Started July 1988***
Sierra Joint	S/P William Duncan	13 Years	Started July 2011

### Notes:

*S/P = Superintendent/President Ch. = Chancellor*

75% of those who have held the position for 10 years and more are single-college district CEOs.  
No college president has served 10 years or more.

*\* Compton CCD restored its full accreditation June 2017. The current CEO Keith Curry started as interim March 2011 and became permanent in July 2013 (full accreditation in June 2017), which makes a total of 13 years.*

*\*\* Retired November 2024*

*\*\*\* Retired July 2024*



# WHY CEO TENURE AND RETENTION MATTER

California community college chancellors, superintendents/presidents, and presidents (CEOs), are expected to be multidimensional leaders capable of navigating a broad range of challenges which include but are not limited to: the dynamic nature of contemporary higher education and the growing skepticism of its value; internal and external constituent relations; student basic needs and success; district and campus climate; bargaining collectively with several employee groups; accreditation and increasingly prevalent reporting requirements; strategic planning; leadership communication; campus infrastructure; fundraising and community relations; the growing threat of no confidence votes; board strife; local, state, and federal advocacy; and a host of unanticipated exigencies.

With increasing demands on institutions of higher education, expectations of CEO performance have also intensified. As the data demonstrate, the proliferation of CEO responsibilities is correlated with shorter tenures and higher turnover. Yet, with this type of quantitative data, at least two central questions for policymakers and researchers emerge: 1) Does this matter? 2) Should this be of concern and for whom? As such, the 11th update begins with the question: Why is CEO tenure and retention important? In formulating a response, academic literature identifies at least two areas of focus: organizational stability and financial sustainability.



## Organizational Stability

While there are limited analyses on the correlation between CEO tenure and institutional success, the available research suggests a relationship between leadership change and district and campus culture. Korschgen et al. (2001) concluded in their study of presidential tenure in higher education that:

- Long-term presidents are best equipped to help change a campus culture.
- Long-term presidents are generally more adept at handling institutional difficulties and making better decisions.
- Long-term presidents have time to build an effective leadership team and develop strong relationships with alumni, legislators, donors, and community leaders.
- Long-term presidents recognize that being effective means evolving and changing with the job.

From the League's statewide perspective, CEOs with longer tenures are more likely to have developed a network of CEO and other colleagues to whom they can turn for counsel, context, and support. Additionally, with longevity comes a more comprehensive understanding of the history, culture, and political dynamics of one's district and/or college. Similar to an athletics coach or an orchestra leader, although some of the players change, successful long-term CEOs adapt and shape the institutions based on a meaningful understanding of the myriad elements constituting its particular local conditions.

Even a cursory glance at media sources demonstrates that a new CEO can impact a college, from its effectiveness to its structure, and culture (Kirkland & Ratcliff, 1994). Although leadership transitions can result in welcome changes to operational practice, the process itself may prove disruptive to faculty and staff. While disruption is sometimes necessary, perpetual change can lead to a culture that simply "waits it out", thereby limiting prospects for successful advancement. Most notably, Birnbaum (1989) highlighted a seeming paradox: presidential influence is limited by college stability, yet presidents promote college stability.

Organizational stability permits leaders to focus on practices and initiatives that yield positive effects on student success while instability can yield financial woes, personnel strife, and even accreditation difficulties—all of which detract from student success. Former California Community Colleges Chancellor Brice Harris observed, "If education reforms are to take hold, it really requires some sustained leadership" (Gordon, 2016). And a Fall 2023 study from *The Journal of Research on the College President* reports, "[S]uch short tenures do not allow enough time for the 'ink to dry' on substantial presidential initiatives because of threats to longevity (Wegner, Henk, & Broege, 2023). Additionally, Korschgen et al. (2001) concluded that longer presidential tenures yield more innovative institutions. They found that exceptionally creative colleges had an average presidential tenure of 13 years and theorized that increased innovation was likely due to the increased trust accrued by presidents over their abnormally long tenure.



## Financial Stability

From a budgetary perspective, CEO tenure matters because leadership transitions are costly. A study by James Finkelstein, professor emeritus of public policy at George Mason University, found that a college presidential search at two- and four-year institutions can cost \$25,000 to \$160,000 (Finkelstein & Wilde, 2016; Finkelstein & Wilde, 2021). He notes that the average service fee for a search firm was \$78,769, plus travel and expenses. This estimate does not include indirect costs incurred by the district or college through staff interviews and planning. Accordingly, changing CEOs cannot be undertaken lightly by districts and colleges, as choosing a new president or chancellor can be expensive and is inevitably a consequential decision. Furthermore, reduced state support as well as dynamic and uncertain financial conditions affecting higher education have led to increased attention to fundraising and resource acquisition.

Furthermore, districts and colleges with chancellors and presidents experiencing short tenures are often saddled with reputations that dissuade qualified candidates from applying for leadership roles. If a district has had several CEOs in a relatively short period of time, the already shrinking pools of qualified applicants are likely to become even less abundant. Although there may not be empirical data detailing this phenomenon, prospective CEOs in California will inevitably consider recent district and college leadership longevity when determining whether to apply for an open position. This is an additional cost of limited CEO longevity that may be difficult to measure yet significant, nonetheless.

For many community college chancellors and even campus presidents, securing resources is a growing aspect of their role. This feature of the presidency is coupled with the continued emphasis on financial management. Sixty-five percent of presidents cite spending most of their time on budget and financial management, followed by fundraising at 58 percent (Gagliardi et al., 2017). According to both the 2018 *Survey of Community College Presidents* (Jaschek & Lederman, 2018) and the 2017 American College President Study (Gagliardi et al., 2017), 71 percent and 61 percent of respondents, respectively, stated that financial matters were the biggest challenge confronting presidents. College leaders are expected to navigate internal fiscal matters with expertise while building long-term relationships that yield support. This includes creating rapport with donors, legislators, and foundations to procure funding and grants. Resource development efforts benefit from the well-established relationships that chancellors and presidents build with key constituent groups and with influential members of their communities. The importance of relationship-building to fundraising success is linked directly to a college's long-term goals as spelled out by its leadership (Hall, 2002).

While longer tenure rates alone cannot create institutional stability or prevent fiscal challenges, they lay the foundation for comprehensive and strategic planning and implementation and for developing and maintaining a more resilient and effective institution. Prior versions of the League's CEO Tenure & Retention Study found that one of the contributing factors to high turnover is the sheer quantity of community college CEO positions. Almost every current and former CEO will likely have the experience of being contacted by a search firm after only a year or even months into a new leadership position. Although leadership turnover at California Community Colleges may be inevitable, with the right institutional response, each transition presents an opportunity for Boards and chancellors to select—and effectively support—those that meet the diverse needs of students and successfully confront the complex challenges of their district.

# NOTABLE FINDINGS OF THE 11<sup>TH</sup> UPDATE

Nationally, according to the 2023 American Council on Education's *Study of the American College Presidency*, the average tenure of a college president was 5.9 years. This compares to an average tenure of 6.5 years in 2016, and 8.5 years in 2006. In the 10-year period beginning August 1, 2014, through July 30, 2024, the average California community college CEO tenure was 5 years, with a median of 4 years. For the most recent two-year period since our last biennial update, the average CEO tenure in the state was 4.3 years, with a median of 3.1 years.

The 11th update reveals differences in both the 10-year and two-year periods in the average tenure lengths between California CEOs who report directly to boards of trustees and those in multi-college districts reporting directly to a chancellor. For the 10-year period from August 1, 2014, to July 30, 2024, chancellor and superintendent/president tenure averaged 5.6 years with a median of 4.4 years. College presidents in multi-college districts reporting to a chancellor averaged 4.5 years with a median of 4 years. During the most recent two-year period, chancellor and superintendent/president tenure averaged 5.2 years with a median of 3.1 years. And college presidents reporting to chancellors over the past two years averaged 3.3 years with a median of 3.1 years. Furthermore, over the past decade, nearly half the CEOs who left their position retired, while less than one-third exited to pursue another position within the California community colleges. Ten percent of departing CEOs were released and a small percentage left California entirely.

## *Noteworthy Findings*

- In California community colleges, more than 1,300 individuals have served in executive leadership roles.
- Four of the five longest-serving leaders are women.
- In July 2024, 43.8 percent of CEOs were women (61 total), down slightly from July 2023 when 47.5 percent were women.
- In Jun 2024, a third gender category was added to tenure data to include nonbinary respondents.
- 17.3 percent of CCC CEOs were Black/African American, more than 2.5 times greater than their percentage of the California population
- 20.1 percent of CCC CEOs identify as Latine.
- In the last 10 years, the average tenure of a permanent CEO was 5 years.
- Of those who left in the previous ten years:
  - 47.1 percent retired
  - 22.7 percent were either released or left for multiple reasons
  - 5.9 percent of departing CEOs were released and a small percentage left California entirely



# **TABLE B: LONGEST-SERVING CEOS (2014-2024)**

Listed in ascending order of tenure in most recent CEO role.

College/District	Name	Tenure Duration	Retired	CCCCEO for Approx. (excl. time served after retired same as Tenure Duration)
Cerro Coso	CP Jill Board	10 years	2020	Same as Tenure Duration
Los Angeles Mission	CP Monte Perez	10 Years 2 Months	2021	13 Years
Los Medanos	CP Robert Kratochvil	10 Years 5 Months	2022	11 Years
Palomar	S/P Robert Deegan	10 Years 5 Months	2015	Same as Tenure Duration
Grossmont-Cuyamaca	Ch. Cindy Miles	10 Years 10 Months	2019	Same as Tenure Duration
Coastline	CP Loretta Adrian	11 Years	2021	Same as Tenure Duration
San Diego Mesa	CP Pamela Luster	11 Years	2022	Same as Tenure Duration
Santa Ana	CP Erlinda Martinez	11 Years 3 Months	2016	Same as Tenure Duration
Lemoore	CP Don Warkentin	11 Years 5 Months	2015	Same as Tenure Duration
<b>Contra Costa</b>	<b>Ch. Helen Benjamin</b>	<b>11 Years 5 Months</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>20 Years 5 Months</b>
Chabot	CP Susan Sperling	11 Years 5 Months	2023	Same as Tenure Duration
Santa Rosa Junior	S/P Frank Chong	11 Years 6 Months	2023	18 Years
Porterville	CP Rosa Carlson	11 Years 9 Months	2017	Same as Tenure Duration
Ohlone	S/P Gari Browning	12 Years	2020	Same as Tenure Duration
Mt. San Antonio	S/P William Scroggins	12 Years	2023	19 Years
Shasta	S/P Joe Wyse	12 Years 5 Months	2023	Same as Tenure Duration
Kern	Ch. Sandra Serrano	12 Years 6 Months	2017	18 Years 6 Months
Citrus	S/P Geraldine Perri	13 Years	2021	19 Years 6 Months
Marin	S/P David Wain Coon	13 Years	2023	18 Years 6 Months
Gavilan	S/P Steve Kinsella	13 Years 6 Months	2016	13 Years 10 Months
Golden West	CP J. Wesley Bryan	13 Years 6 Months	2018	Same as Tenure Duration
De Anza	CP Brian Murphy	14 Years	2018	Same as Tenure Duration
<b>San Diego CCD</b>	<b>Ch. Constance Carroll</b>	<b>17 Years</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>43 Years</b>
Irvine Valley	CP Glenn Roquemore	17 Years 4 Months	2020**	17 Years 8 Months
<b>El Camino</b>	<b>S/P Thomas Fallo</b>	<b>20 Years 7 Months</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>21 Years 6 Months</b>
<b>West Hills</b>	<b>Ch. Frank Gornick</b>	<b>23 Years 6 Months</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>Same as Tenure Duration</b>

## Notes:

CP = College President S/P = Superintendent/President Ch. = Chancellor

\*\* Resigned in 2019 as a CEO and went back to teaching, about a year later officially retired

Teal text = CEO who held the position of CCC CEO in the system for over 20 years combined

# DIVERSITY SNAPSHOT

Over the last two years, significant strides have been made within California community college leadership to better reflect the state's diversity and that of the student population. Since the League's last report, we have seen the largest increase in Latine\* and Black/African American leadership in 22 years. There have also been increases among Asian American and Pacific Islanders in executive roles.

To date, the leadership of California community colleges demonstrates both gaps and higher-than-state-averages as compared to California's overall racial and ethnic diversity. According to US Census data as of July 1, 2023, the largest racial and ethnic group in California was Latine at 40.4 percent, followed by White (non-Hispanic) at 34.3 percent, Asian and Pacific Islander at 16.5 percent, Black/African American at 6.5 percent, and Two or More Races at 4.3 percent of the state's population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023).

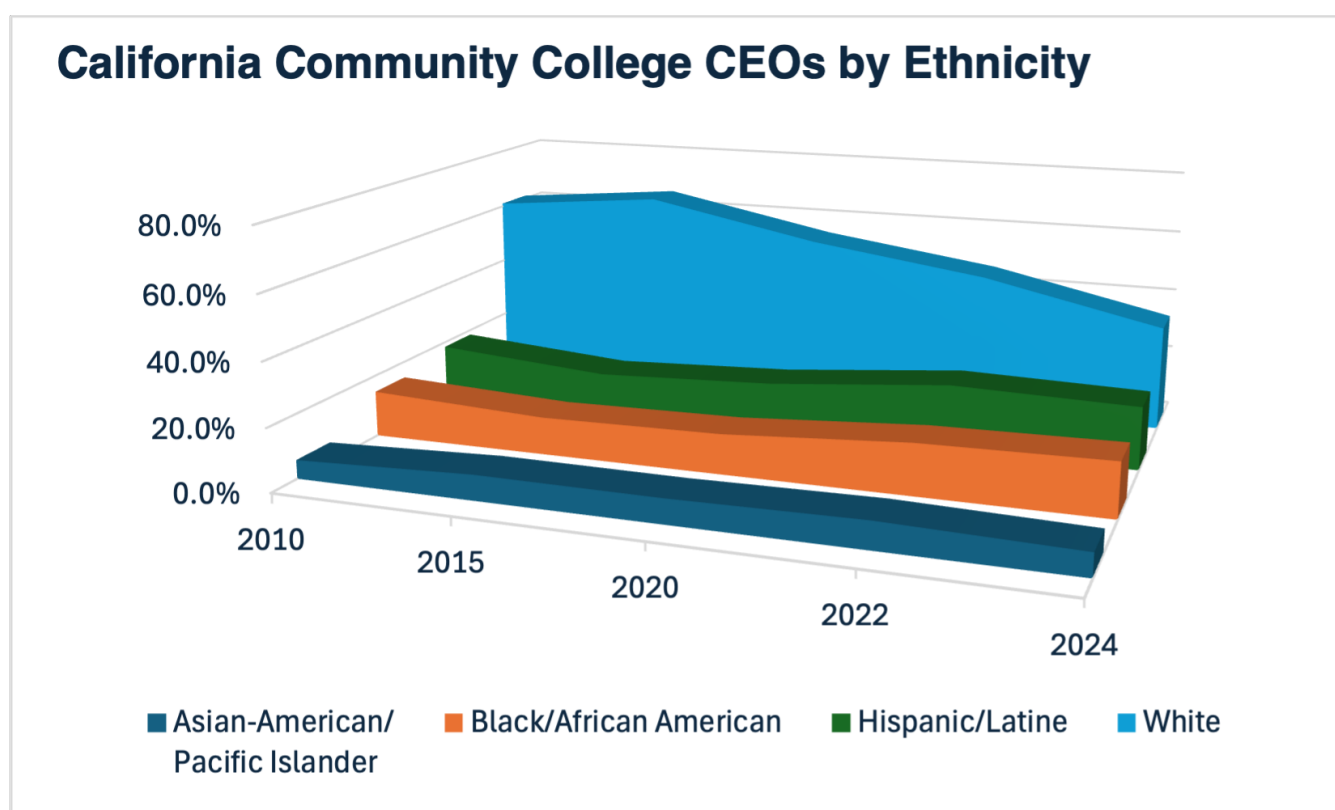
In 2020, White CEOs were the majority at California community colleges at almost 55 percent; however, that number has decreased to 33.8 percent, its lowest historical percentage. Latine leadership now represents more than one-fifth of all leaders, and at 17.3 percent, Black/African American leaders have seen the third largest increase. According to a recent article, California's CEO diversity is greater than the national average. In February 2022, *Inside Higher Ed* reported that nationally, in 2019-20, 78 percent of all CEOs hired were White; a year later, that number was 64.6 percent (Lederman, 2022). The percentage of Black/ African American presidents grew in that same timeframe from 14.6 to 25.3 percent, and Latine leadership went from 4 to 6.8 percent. The article also noted that two-year institutions hired the greatest percentage of Black/African American leaders.





## Breakdown of California Community College CEOs by Ethnicity

	2010	2015	2020	2022	2024
Asian-American/ Pacific Islander	5.9%	8.0%	7.8%	8.6%	7.2%
Black/African American	14.7%	12.0%	12.8%	16.4%	17.3%
Hispanic/Latine*	18.4%	14.0%	16.3%	21.4%	20.1%
White	61.0%	66.0%	54.6%	46.4%	33.8%
Multiracial and other			6.4%	5.0%	5.8%
No Response			2.1%	2.1%	15.8%



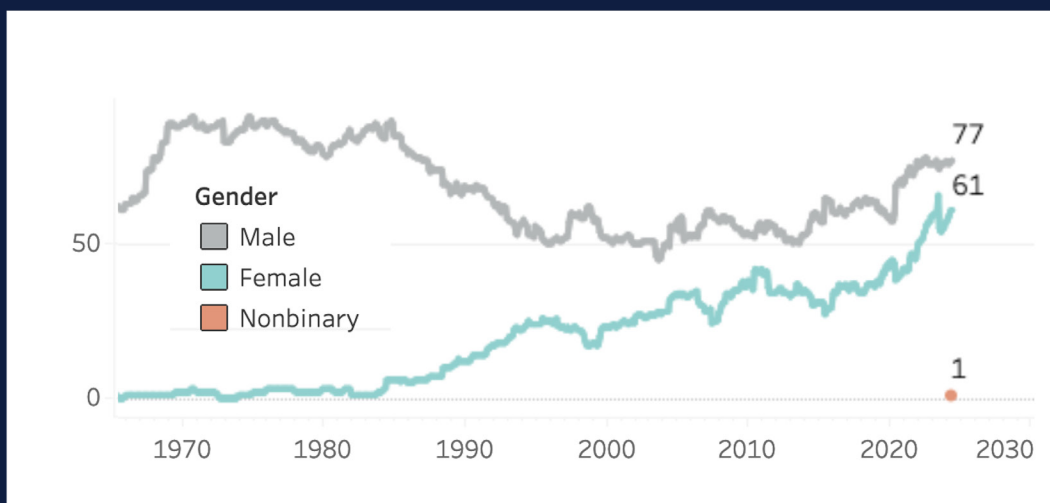
In 2021 US Census estimates for California, White and Black/African American CCC CEOs were represented in higher percentages than the state's average by 11 and 10 percent, respectively. By 2024, using the latest census data available from 2023, White CEOs represented 33.8 percent of the total for California community colleges, or 0.5 percent less than their share of the state's population, and Black/African American CEO representation was more than two and one-half times greater than their total population in the state at 17.3 percent of CCC CEOs. In contrast, Latine\* and Asian/Pacific Islander CEOs are more significantly underrepresented at less than half of their respective populations in California. According to the 2023 Census, California's Latine population with 40.4 percent of the state's total, while League data find Latine CEOs constitute 20.1 percent of CCC CEOs. Asian/Pacific Islanders are 17 percent of California's population, and 7.2 percent of CCC CEOs.

\* Latine is a general term used in singular and plural forms and for nonbinary and gender-fluid individuals. Latine applies the Spanish -e, denoting an unspecified gender, as in *estudiante* ("student") and *prudente* ("sensible").

# WOMEN AND THE CEO GENDER GAP

While the percentage of women college presidents in the United States over the past 30 years has increased slowly, women remain underrepresented and typically follow different paths to the presidency than men (Melidona et al., 2023). The latest American College President national study reports that 32.8 percent of presidents at all types of colleges and universities are women. For California community colleges, the gap over the past three decades has narrowed to 43.8 percent of districts and colleges being led by women.

Historically, women have been underrepresented in CEO roles across many industries, including California's community colleges. Since 1910, over 1,300 people have served as CEOs in California's community colleges, yet only 318 of those roles have been filled by women. Today, however, this trend is shifting. As of July 2024, 43.8 percent of all California community college CEOs identify as female, 52.5 percent as male, and 0.7 percent as nonbinary. Over the past five years, the percentage of female CEOs has increased by 5 percent, while the percentage of male CEOs has decreased by a similar percentage. California now surpasses the national average for female college presidents, demonstrating our commitment to closing the gender gap within college leadership.



This shift includes a significant milestone for the California Community Colleges itself, which appointed its first female Chancellor, Sonya Christian, Ph.D., in 2023 to lead the nation's largest and most diverse system of public higher education. Before stepping into her statewide role, Dr. Christian served as the Chancellor of the Kern Community College District for three years, reflecting the average tenure for a female community college CEO of 3.4 years. Dr. Christian also served as the President of Bakersfield College for eight years. Dr. Christian's selection represents a broader wave of female leadership emerging in the community college system.





## The Rise in Women CEOs in California Community Colleges

Throughout the 20th century, the percentage of women CEOs consistently remained below 33 percent. The gender gap began to narrow in 2001. In April 2020, 59 women held the CCC CEO position, yet the number dropped to 53 by August 2020. The latest figure from July 2024 finds 61 CCC CEOs are women.

There are two notable stretches where no woman held a CEO leadership position at a California community college: 1951-1965 and again in 1973. However, several of the longest-serving CEOs in California community colleges are women. College of the Canyons CEO Dianne Van Hook had a notable tenure of 36 years. An honorable mention goes to Grace Van Dyke Bird, who led Bakersfield College for 29 years from 1921-1950. Constance Carroll holds the distinction of serving the longest total number of years in executive leadership positions in the California Community Colleges' nearly 120-year history, with positions at various colleges since 1977, including presidencies at Indian Valley College, College of Marin, Saddleback College, and San Diego Community College District, where she served as chancellor from 2004 until her retirement in 2021.

The first woman CEO to have led an individual college was Belle Coolidge, who in 1917 was also one of Sacramento City College's founders and Sacramento's first woman mayor. Despite her achievement, it would take many years for women to ascend to the roles of chancellor or superintendent/president. Until 1948, only men had led single-college districts until Lorraine Knoles was first appointed to an interim position at the San Joaquin Delta Community College District. In 1969, the Mt. San Antonio College Board selected Marie Mills, making her the first woman hired to lead a single-college district on a permanent basis. At multi-college districts, it was not until 1978 that a woman was appointed as an interim chancellor. Six years later, in 1984, Yuba Community College District appointed Patricia K. Wirth to a permanent chancellor role.





## The Wave of Female Leadership in California Community Colleges

Over the past decade, many colleges and districts have solicited help from a retired CEO to serve in an interim role until the permanent CEO position was hired. Out of the 31 retired CEOs positions recruited, 45 percent were women. Of the 48 women California community college CEOs serving in an interim capacity, 11 served in that role for more than 12 months and none were offered the permanent position. In California, overall tenure for women CEOs is still lower than their male counterparts. The average tenure for women CEOs, excluding interims, is 3.4 years for both multi- and single-college districts; average tenure for male CEOs is 5 years. The data suggest that CCCs have made significant progress in promoting women to the ranks of CEO over the past few decades. These improvements can be volatile, however, as illustrated by a slight decline since 2016. Overall, women CEOs continue to be underrepresented relative to their percentage in California's higher education student population.

The ethnic diversity among female college presidents is also noteworthy. While the American Council on Education's *American College President* (Melidona et al., 2023) indicates that over two-thirds of female college presidents nationwide identify as White (69 percent), California presents a more diverse picture. In California, 62 percent of female community college CEOs identify as women of color, which includes Asian-Pacific Islander (API), Black or African American, Hispanic or Latine, multi-ethnic CEOs, and Other. This percentage has grown by 12 percent in the past five years, whereas in 2019, 50 percent of the female college leaders in California identified as White.

While these strides are significant, California continues to work towards true gender parity in college leadership. According to the 2020 Census, 50.1 percent of Californians identify as female. Similarly, out of 2.1 million students attending California's community colleges, 52.7 percent identify as female. While female college CEOs fall short of achieving gender parity, current trends indicate that gap will close before long.

California's progress is further underscored by the state Senate's recent achievement of gender parity for the first time in history, with at least 50 percent of California's Senators identifying as female, and the state Legislature is expected to follow suit. Looking ahead, California may potentially elect its first female Governor in 2028.

The rise of female CEOs is also supported by professional development efforts aimed at increasing women's representation in leadership. Each year, the Community College League of California hosts the Asilomar Leadership Skills Seminar, an intensive four-day seminar that focuses on the issues confronting women who have committed to community college administration, either in their current position or as a future goal. The program's goal is to equip participants to take on expanded leadership roles, including college CEO positions. Many current female community college CEOs are alumni of the Asilomar program, which in 2024 celebrates 40 years of professional and personal development on women's issues in California community colleges.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

With short tenures at California community colleges the norm, it is incumbent upon district and college leaders to proactively incorporate the means to support CEOs from the time they are selected and throughout their tenure. This means embedding ongoing professional learning expectations in the CEO evaluation and including financial support in every CEO contract. Moreover, considering the political dynamics at many districts and on many campuses, board and chancellor support must include the time for participation in such professional learning, and unwavering reinforcement of this expectation from the board of trustees both privately and publicly.

Whereas CEOs and those in leadership positions in most every industry have board encouragement and financial support for ongoing professional learning, this simply hasn't been the dominant culture in California community colleges. Although there are exceptions, the tremendous challenges of the position, the shrinking number of vice presidents and others aspiring to the college presidency, and the increasingly rapid ascent through roles with progressively greater responsibilities, means that boards of trustees eager to lengthen CEO tenure and increase their capacity for success will increase their investments in their only employee and support the same for college presidents in multi-college districts.

We include a list of some of the CEO and aspiring CEO professional development programs here:

- CEO Strategic Leadership Program, Community College League of California
- Wheelhouse Institute, UC Davis
- Aspen Institute
- American Association of Community Colleges (AACC)



# CLOSING OBSERVATIONS

The 11th update of the Community College League of California's Tenure & Retention Report underscores the pressures on CEOs and leadership. Leading any institution of higher education is a rewarding, dynamic, and never-ending job. Leading one of California's community colleges is an unparalleled test on creativity, social skill, and resilience.

California community college CEOs are in company of hundreds of nationwide higher education leaders who are driven by their commitment to students and distracted by the realities of organizational structure, competing stakeholder demands, and far too many meetings. A former CEO described the phenomenon:

*"The central problem of the presidency these days is what some political scientists call 'calcification,' a hardening of our internal political configuration. We have a university senate, a legislature, with standing committees, with many rules, with representatives who are assigned some extremely heavy lifting, and with others who don't do squat. The president visits the legislature, rushes in and out of meetings. It all feels heavy, a chore for all the incredibly busy people involved."* ~ Susan Herbst, president emeritus, University of Connecticut

However, a February 2024 *Inside Higher Ed* article noted there is optimism amid uncertainty. CEOs recognize the importance AI will have for the future of their institutions yet are cautious about how they will navigate its rise. The national political landscape weighs on the minds of CEOs who are concerned about federal influence on diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as student financial aid, funding, changes in accreditation, free inquiry, and civil dialogue. Many expressed concerns about public skepticism about higher education, yet had confidence in their own organizations (Moody, 2024).



# DEDICATION

We would be remiss if we didn't recognize two prominent and influential California community college leaders exiting during the period covered by this report: Dr. Francisco Rodriguez and Dr. Dianne Van Hook — both ended their chancellor positions at the Los Angeles and Santa Clarita Community College Districts in 2024. Drs. Rodriguez and Van Hook dedicated their professional lives to advancing the comprehensive mission of California community colleges and their respective influences will continue for decades to come.

With CVs filled with awards, leadership roles, successful bond measures passed, and public service and leadership posts at the local, state, and national levels, their remarkable careers combined span nearly eight decades.

In addition to being the youngest individual selected as a CCC CEO at the age of 37, Chancellor Van Hook's career included positions at Feather River, Lake Tahoe, Santa Ana, and finally at College of the Canyons, where she served as chancellor for 36 years. Dr. Van Hook served as president of the League's CEO Board in the 1994-95 academic year and played an active role in CEO professional learning programming throughout her career.

Chancellor Rodriguez's career in public higher education spans 43 years. He served as president of Cosumnes River, Mira Costa, and led the nation's largest community college district of Los Angeles for a decade. Always active beyond his immediate role, Dr. Rodriguez chaired the League's Advisory Committee on Legislation, and was a consistent presence a powerful advocate in Sacramento and in Washington, D.C.



**DR. DIANNE VAN HOOK**



**DR. FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ**

# REFERENCES

- Birnbaum, R. (1989). Presidential succession and institutional function in higher education. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 60 (2), 123-135.
- Bornstein, R. (2003, November 14). Why college presidents don't last. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. [https://www.chronicle.com/article/why-college-presidents-dont-last/?cid=gen\\_sign\\_in](https://www.chronicle.com/article/why-college-presidents-dont-last/?cid=gen_sign_in)
- Community College League of California. (2024). *CEO tenure & retention dashboard*. [Data set]. Retrieved from: [www.ccleague.org](http://www.ccleague.org)
- Finkelstein, J. & Wilde, J. (2016). Hiring a search firm? Do your homework first. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.
- Finkelstein, J. & Wilde, J. (2021, November 15). A fundamental change in hiring college presidents is unfolding. *Higher Ed Dive*. <https://www.highereddive.com/news/a-fundamental-change-in-hiring-college-presidents-is-unfolding/609978/>
- Gagliardi, J. S., Espinosa, L. L., Turk, J. M., & Taylor, M. (2017). The American college president study 2017: Summary profile and employment characteristics. *American Council on Education*. [https://aascu.org/wp-content/uploads/public-purpose/17summer\\_p6\\_ErosionPresidentialTenure.pdf](https://aascu.org/wp-content/uploads/public-purpose/17summer_p6_ErosionPresidentialTenure.pdf)
- Gordon, L. (2016, August 30). Survey finds worrisome short tenures for community college chiefs. *Ed Source*. Retrieved from: [www.edsource.org](http://www.edsource.org).
- Hall, Margaret Rooney. (2002). Building on relationships: A fundraising approach for community colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 26(1), pp. 47-60.
- Harris, M. S., & Ellis, M. K. (2018). Exploring involuntary presidential turnover in American higher education. *Journal of Higher Education*, 89(3), 294-317. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2017.1390969>
- Jaschik, S., & Lederman, D. (2018). 2018 survey of community college presidents. *Inside Higher Ed and Gallup*. [https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/files/media/2018\\_Presidents\\_Survey\\_Final.pdf](https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/files/media/2018_Presidents_Survey_Final.pdf)
- Kirkland, T. P., & Ratcliff, J. L. (1994). When community colleges change their presidents. *Community College Review*, 21(4), 3.
- Korschgen, A., Fuller, R., & Gardner, J. (2001) The impact of presidential migration raising questions about presidential tenure in higher education. *American Association of Higher Education Bulletin*, 53(6), 3-6.
- Melidona, D., Cecil, B. G., Cassell, A., & Chessman, H. M. (2023). The American college president: 2023 edition. *American Council on Education*.
- Lederman, D. (2022, February 13). Diversity on the rise among college presidents. *Inside Higher Ed*. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2022/02/14/colleges-have-hired-more-minority-presidents-amid-racial-reckoning>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). QuickFacts: California. *U.S. Department of Commerce*. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/CA/PST045223>
- Wepner, S. B., Henk, W. A., Broege, N. C. R. (2023). A conceptual framework for understanding presidential longevity. *Journal of Research on the College President*, 7. <https://collegepresidentresearch.uark.edu/2023/12/presidential-longevity/>







## Community College League of California

2017 O Street / Sacramento, CA 95811

Phone: (916) 444-8641 / Fax: (916) 444-2954

Email: [cclc@cclleague.org](mailto:cclc@cclleague.org)