A YEAR AGO, THE THREE LEADING COMMUNITY college associations in the country and two national community college organizations gathered to address the impending leadership crisis. They included Achieving the Dream Inc. (ATD), the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT), the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program, and the League for Innovation in the Community College, which were joined by Student Success Initiatives of the University of Texas at Austin.

The leaders of the national organizations came together because of the significant exodus of retiring community college presidents, and the urgency as well as opportunity that this exodus presents. According to AACC, more than 500 presidents have either retired or moved to another presidency within the last three years. This leadership crisis is of such a magnitude that we must all work together if we are to shine a needed spotlight on the impending impact of the leadership exodus. All of the associations and organizations have agreed to share program information and support each other as they accelerate their efforts focused on the leadership pipeline.

In their own voices, each association and organization has provided a review of their work in addressing the leadership pipeline crisis to share with the ACCT membership.
Achieving the Dream's vision is a nation in which community colleges are highly valued for preserving access and assuring that their students, especially low income students and students of color, achieve their goals for academic success, personal growth, and economic opportunity. None of this is feasible without strong leadership at all levels of an institution, but especially at the presidential level. With significant numbers of presidents — and similar percentages of senior staff and faculty — retiring, community colleges face both a challenge and an opportunity to recruit and support leadership that can act upon deep commitment to student access and success in ways that produce better outcomes for students, at lower costs, and with an unwavering commitment to equity.

- ATD’s institutional change model, which includes leadership coaching, builds organizational development and change management capacity aimed at securing broad-based support for reforms that produce better student outcomes.
- ATD Leader Colleges have evidence of increased student outcomes and serve as models for effective policy and practice. As part of its new strategic plan, ATD will provide training and support to presidents as they speak out regionally and nationally on critical issues relating to completion and student success.
- In partnership with the Aspen Institute’s College Excellence Program, Achieving the Dream released Crisis and Opportunity: Aligning the Community College Presidency with Student Success (2013) to call greater attention to essential skills and qualities of community college presidents. ATD continues to call attention to these skills and the acute need for recruiting and hiring practices that place in key community college positions deeply committed leaders with the skills needed to drive equity- and evidence-based internal reforms while also building external partnerships that preserve access and improve student outcomes.
- In 2013-14, ATD and the Aspen Institute piloted symposia for Leader College and Aspen Prize presidents to provide an opportunity for reflection and peer consultation on building a broad-based culture of inquiry and evidence, determining when and how to restructure for greater student success, and maintaining an equity focus in the midst of increased demands for accelerated and better student outcomes. Materials used at the symposia will contribute to open-access curricular materials under development by Aspen. In addition, ATD anticipates offering similar symposia on an ongoing basis.

For more information, please visit www.achievingthedream.org.

William Trueheart is president and CEO of Achieving the Dream, Ltd.

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) recognizes that transformational change of the institution cannot take place if the leaders of the nation’s community colleges are not adequately prepared with the skills necessary to deal with organizational complexities. To that end, AACC provides a full range of leadership and professional development opportunities for its member colleges.

The AACC John E. Roueche Future Leaders Institute is the association’s signature program for emerging leaders. The Roueche-FLI, named in honor of Dr. John Roueche, a significant leader in the community college movement, is a week-long, cohort-based program with curriculum built on the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders. This program is known for providing significant hands-on interactive activities that allow emerging leaders to put learning into practice.

On average, AACC receives official notices of at least two new CEO appointments per week. With major turnover in senior leadership, the association offers several programs and services focused on ensuring that new CEOs have a successful and lengthy tenure. Annually, AACC offers a New CEO Institute, preceding its annual convention. This boot camp provides new CEOs with information on current trends and issues facing two-year institutions. Also, the Presidents Academy Summer Institute (PASD) brings together new and seasoned CEOs to discuss ways to improve student access and success.

In addition to individual development, AACC launched its first High Performance Team Training program in August 2014 in Washington, D.C. HPT was established to identify obstacles that are preventing community college teams from moving into high performance mode. If the teams are performing well, the training will help them harness that effort to elevate their work to the next level. High Performance Team Training is made possible through a generous grant from the Lumina Foundation for Education.

And, after receiving requests from a number of its member colleges, AACC recently launched Executive Leadership Advising. The executive leadership adviser is a coach with the goal of assisting CEOs in achieving peak performance. The adviser can provide facilitation services to assist the college leadership team in maneuvering through organizational complexities, assistance in developing strategic directions and planning, support in deploying the college’s human resources, and help with developing community relations to advance the goals of the college. For more information, please visit www.aacc.nche.edu.

Walter Bumphus is president and CEO of the American Association of Community Colleges.
Community colleges have never before faced greater expectations to deliver more credentials of higher quality at a lower per-pupil cost to an increasingly diverse population. To help ensure that community college leaders are equipped with the skills needed to meet these demands, the Aspen Institute’s College Excellence Program is engaged in a number of initiatives:

• In late 2013, we released a report with Achieving the Dream, Crisis & Opportunity, which:
  – Identifies the five essential qualities of exceptional community college presidents, defined as those capable of leading their institutions to high and improving levels of student success:
    1. Deep commitment to student access and success
    2. Willingness to take significant risks
    3. Ability to create lasting internal change
    4. Capacity to build exceptional external partnerships
    5. Strong fundraising and resource allocation ability
  – Contrasts the five essential qualities with the presidential characteristics community college trustees have historically valued in searches, and with what traditional and continuing education programs for community college leaders typically teach.

• In July 2014, we released a set of open-access hiring tools to help boards of trustees, search committees, search consultants, and others identify and hire presidents with the full range of qualities and abilities needed to lead their institutions to high and improving levels of student success. The hiring tools include a rubric for evaluating candidates; questions for in-person interviews; and a protocol for conducting reference checks. The tools are designed to enable hiring officials to set standards and gather all of the information needed to assess and select strong presidents.

• In early 2015, we will release open-access curricular materials designed to impart skills at the core of presidents’ capacity to lead their community colleges to significant increases in student success in four areas: learning, completion, labor market, and equitable outcomes. The curriculum is divided into three sections, each containing several modules: what student success means and why it matters; leading internal change; and working with external partners to achieve collective impact.

The curriculum does not include every necessary skill for presidents. Indeed, one of our principal aims is to encourage the adoption of its units, material, and ideas by others engaged in the important work of developing community college leaders.

For more information, please visit www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/college-excellence/new-college-leadership-project-aspen-institute.

With a name like the League for Innovation in the Community College, it’s not hard to understand how innovation has long been the cornerstone of this 45-year-old organization. In addition to innovation serving as the catalyst from which all League services and activities emanate, diversity and inclusion serve as vital and inextricable connections to our students, staff, and communities.

As community colleges are deeply engaged in the completion agenda, a shift in emphasis from access to completion prompted philosophical and practical tensions. New online technologies such as massive online open courses (MOOCs) are providing instructional delivery options to teach the masses. Developmental education is being “blown up.” And accountability for learning and completion outcomes continues to escalate. Given these and many other changing dynamics that are influencing community colleges, diversity and inclusion of students and staff grow increasingly important toward our collective goal of producing a pluralistic, educated citizenry.

As if that is not enough major change to consider, community colleges are beginning to feel the ramifications of massive turnover in leadership in both the administrative and instructional areas. According to Dr. Walter Bumphus in his comments during the 2013 AACC convention, more than 140 community college CEOs retired in 2012, with a relatively staggering number to follow suit over the next five years. Clearly, to better reflect and serve our increasingly diverse students and communities, preparing the next generation of diverse community college leaders, both inside and outside the classroom, is mission critical.

In collaboration with many good partners in the community college field, the League has a long history of leadership development that focuses on preparing diverse leaders of the future. A few examples of the League’s leadership in these areas follow.

Accelerated Career Paths for Higher Education (PATHS). Newly designed in 2014, Accelerated Career Paths for Higher Education (PATHS) was developed in partnership by the League, Open Doors Group, and Softchalk, LLC, to help address what some thought leaders refer to as the academic leadership crisis. PATHS is designed to help address this crisis by offering aspiring academic leaders, a unique, career-boosting opportunity — packaged in 12 hours of intense online training.

Multiple opportunities for academic management positions are available due to demographic changes and academic hiring practices. The PATHS program focuses on what it takes to become a leader in today’s higher education environment. The key to the success of PATHS is its combination of mentoring services and a highly interactive, team-based online learning experience. PATHS will first be available from September 8 through October 31, 2014.
National Institute for Leadership Development. In 1980, a joint effort of the League and the American Association of Women in Community Colleges (AAWCC), initially funded by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), was designed to assist women to assume major policy-making positions in community colleges. The successful original program evolved into a spectrum of programs serving women leaders at all levels and led to the establishment of the National Institute for Leadership Development (NILD). NILD graduates, most now senior administrators, have come from every U.S. state and several territories, Canada, and beyond. Women who participated in NILD programs have had a major and lasting impact on community colleges and their staffing patterns.

Executive Leadership Institute. In 1988, the League and The University of Texas at Austin received funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to launch a major new community college leadership development initiative. It included several important elements that have expanded to comprise the heart of the League’s activities in diversity, inclusion, and leadership development. The Executive Leadership Institute (ELI) was established to provide an opportunity for potential community college presidents to review their abilities and interests, refine their leadership skills, and engage in discussions on leadership issues with outstanding educational leaders from across North America. ELI participants are selected from among applicants who currently serve in senior leadership positions, reporting at the campus or college CEO level. They qualify for presidencies based on educational, experiential, and community leadership backgrounds. Almost 800 participants from North America, Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore have graduated from ELI, the first and most successful program of its kind. Forty-seven percent of participants have been women, and 24 percent have been participants of color. Forty-three percent of all graduates, and as many as 70 percent of some graduating classes, have become presidents.

Expanding Leadership Diversity. In 1989, the Expanding Leadership Diversity in Community Colleges project was launched to expand the pipeline of diverse mid-managers and faculty leaders preparing to advance into senior leadership positions. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation again provided generous support. The key objective of the project was to develop talented minority leaders to ensure a diverse stream of qualified individuals in the leadership pipeline. Well over 100 individuals participated over nine years, most now serving as deans and vice presidents. Over 20 percent have become presidents.

To best prepare our students, staff, and community leaders of the future, we must take a moment to reflect upon the cornerstones that are the culture and values of community colleges. Innovation, diversity, and inclusion must be imbued in the preparation of the next generation of leaders in order to have the best chance helping those we serve meet their student success and completion goals.

For more information, please visit www.league.org.

Gerardo de los Santos is president and CEO of The League for Innovation in the Community College.

Most trustees are familiar with ACCT’s services, so we have included a recap of ACCT’s efforts to address the leadership exodus. Through its executive search services, leadership training webinars, and succession planning services, ACCT helps to identify and prepare future leaders for presidential positions. ACCT’s board leadership services provide professional development for new and experienced leaders through retreats, workshops, presidential evaluations, and institutional leadership analysis. At national gatherings for the annual ACCT Leadership Congress and invitational Symposium on Completion, ACCT continues its efforts to keep the important issue of the impending leadership crisis at the forefront of discussions. Additionally, ACCT has expanded its services and projects to include a survey of all community college presidents last year, in order to better understand the varied pathways successful community colleges presidents took to achieving their first presidency. A report on the survey findings will be made available in late 2014.

Last year, we acknowledged the joint effort of the associations and organizations on the national stage at the 2013 ACCT Leadership Congress membership luncheon in Seattle, Washington. This year, we have planned a special concurrent Congress session, during which all of the organizations will report on their progress to date. Please plan to join the leaders from these organizations to participate in discussions about efforts to address the impending leadership crisis at the 2014 ACCT Leadership Congress at the Hyatt Regency Chicago at 10:30 a.m. on Thursday, October 23. Visit www.acct.org/events/2014-acct-leadership-congress for further details, or contact Narcisa Polonio, Ed.D., executive vice president for research, education, and board leadership services, at narcisa_polonio@acct.org or 202-775-4667.

J. Noah Brown is president and CEO of the Association of Community College Trustees.