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**2017 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence Awarded to  
South Dakota's Lake Area Technical Institute**

*\$1 Million Prize Recognizes Excellence in: Learning, Degree Completion, Minority and Low-Income Student Success, and Employment and Earnings*

**Washington, DC, March 14, 2017** – The Aspen Institute announced today that **Lake Area Technical Institute (LATI) in Watertown, South Dakota is the winner of the [2017 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence](#)**, the nation's preeminent recognition of high achievement and improvement in America's community colleges and benchmark for community college reform.

The \$1 million Aspen Prize, awarded every two years since 2011, recognizes outstanding institutions selected from an original pool of more than 1,000 public community colleges nationwide. With a singular focus on student success, the Prize process centers on a rigorous assessment of institutions' achievements in four areas: learning; certificate and degree completion; employment and earnings; and high levels of access and success for minority and low-income students.

Aspen named two Florida colleges as **finalists-with-distinction: Broward College (Fort Lauderdale) and Indian River State College (Fort Pierce). Two top ten finalists were recognized for their strong record of improvement with the "Rising Star" award: Odessa College (Odessa, TX) and San Jacinto College (Pasadena, TX).** All four will receive \$100,000 in Prize funds, while grand prize winner LATI will receive \$600,000 in Prize funds. (See full list of Top Ten Prize Finalists below and read more information about them at <http://as.pn/1kr>.)

"On every measure of community college excellence, Lake Area Technical Institute is firing on all cylinders," said Joshua Wyner, Executive Director of the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program. "Its outstanding graduation and job placement rates are a result of its deep commitment to ensure that all students thrive in the classroom and in great jobs after graduation. LATI and all the Prize finalists offer lessons for community colleges across the nation—large and small, rural and urban—on how to improve student success. In the end, the Prize winning colleges provide a blueprint for student-centered reform."

The Prize winner and finalists were announced at an event at the Newseum in Washington, DC, by Aspen Prize Jury co-chairs Mitch Daniels, president of Purdue University and former Governor of Indiana, and former Representative George Miller (D-CA). Governor Daniels and Representative Miller lead a distinguished Prize Jury of higher education experts to select the top colleges, part of a rigorous review process that included the examination of extensive data on performance and

improvements in learning, graduation, workforce, and equitable outcomes as well as multi-day site visits to each of the ten finalist institutions.

Community colleges today enroll more than 40 percent of all US undergraduates – 6 million students – working toward degrees and certificates. These include growing numbers of lower-income and minority students. While nationwide, fewer than 40% of all community college students graduate, Aspen Prize finalist institutions demonstrate that community colleges can help students achieve higher levels of success while in college and in completing a degree that leads to well-paying jobs and careers after college.

### **Aspen Prize Winner - Lake Area Technical Institute (Watertown, SD)**

Recognized as a finalist-with-distinction in every one of the 4 Prize cycles since it was first announced, Lake Area Technical Institute has continuously improved in two key areas: teaching students both technical and professional skills needed to succeed in the workplace and closing the gap between Pell grant student graduation rates and others. Every faculty and staff member at LATI has a single-minded focus: ensuring students succeed and are prepared for careers in good, available jobs. Its outstanding graduation/transfer rate of 74%, among the highest in the nation, is fueled by its highly structured programs of defined courses and hands-on educational approach. LATI's 1,900 students, most attending full-time, are guided into a technical program when they enroll and provided a clear pathway to a degree or certificate. LATI faculty track student success from enrollment to graduation and also work with local employers to constantly refresh their exemplary programs to provide students with the skills they need to be job-ready. Regional employers invest heavily in LATI and its students, providing equipment, scholarships, and field experiences and collaborating with instructors and hiring LATI graduates who then go on, as employers themselves to continue the cycle.

Student outcomes:

- 74% graduation/transfer rate among highest in the nation, highest in 2017 Prize Finalist pool (compared to 39% nationally)
- 99% of graduates are employed after graduation
- 80% retention rate (compared with 52% nationally)
- On average, LATI graduates entering the workforce earn 27% more than other new hires in its region

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*For more details about what distinguished the 2017 Aspen Prize Winner LATI and Finalists-with-Distinction, as well as information and lessons learned from the all of the Prize Finalists listed below, visit <http://as.pn/1kr>.*

### **Finalists-with-Distinction**

#### **Broward College (Fort Lauderdale, FL) – 63,000 students**

- Highly diverse student population (66 % underrepresented minorities) attain bachelor's degree at rate 50% higher than the national average
- Virtually no gap in three-year graduation/transfer rates between all students (47%) and underrepresented minorities (46%)

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### **Indian River State College (Fort Pierce, FL) – 24,000 students**

- Strong three-year graduation/transfer rates for all students (49%, compared to 39% nationally) and strong graduation rates for underrepresented minorities (43%, compared to 34% nationally)
- Ranked third most affordable college in the nation by US Department of Education

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### **Rising Star Award Winners for rapid and dramatic improvement**

#### **Odessa College (Odessa, TX) – 7,300 students**

- Dramatic increase in annual graduation/transfer rates in just five years (from 15% to 32%)
- Five years after graduating, class of 2010 graduates earned more than double the wages of all other workers in the region
- A remarkably low course withdrawal rate of 1.8%

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#### **San Jacinto College (Pasadena, TX) – 41,000 students**

- Strong improvement in three-year graduation/transfer rate, from 29% to 38% in five years
- Number of credentials awarded to students rose from 38% to 51% in five years

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### **Finalists**

**Anoka-Ramsey Community College (Coon Rapids, MN)**

**Chaffey College (Rancho Cucamonga, CA)**

**Northeast Community College (Norfolk, NE)**

**Pasadena City College (Pasadena, CA)**

**West Kentucky Community and Technical College (Paducah, KY)**

Previous winners of the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence include: Santa Fe College in Gainesville, Florida (2015); co-winners Santa Barbara City College in Santa Barbara, California and Walla Walla Community College in Walla Walla, Washington (2013); Valencia College in Orlando, Florida (2011 inaugural Prize winner). According to the Prize rules, former winners were not eligible to reapply this cycle.

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**The Aspen Prize** is funded by the Joyce Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, the Siemens Foundation, and Pearson.

**The Aspen College Excellence Program** aims to advance higher education practices, policies, and leadership that significantly improve student outcomes. Through the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, the Siemens Technical Scholars Program, and other initiatives, the College Excellence Program works to improve colleges' understanding and capacity to teach and graduate students, especially the growing population of low-income and minority students on American campuses. For more information, visit <http://highered.aspeninstitute.org/>.

**The Aspen Institute** is an educational and policy studies organization based in Washington, DC. Its mission is to foster leadership based on enduring values and to provide a nonpartisan venue for dealing with critical issues. The Institute is based in Washington, DC; Aspen, Colorado; and on the Wye River on Maryland's Eastern Shore. It also has offices in New York City and an international network of partners. For more information, visit [www.aspeninstitute.org](http://www.aspeninstitute.org).