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## **Texas' Odessa College Wins National Award for Rapid Improvement in Completion**

*Top Ten Finalist for the 2017 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, Odessa College Receives \$100,000 for tripling of graduation and transfer rates*

**Washington, DC, March 14, 2017** – A finalist for the 2017 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, **Odessa College in Odessa, Texas was recognized today with a Rising Star awards for improving student completion.**

Awarded every two years since 2011, the \$1 million Aspen Prize recognizes institutions for their outstanding outcomes in four areas: student learning; certificate and degree completion; employment and earnings; and high levels of access and success for minority and low-income students. The Prize is the nation's preeminent recognition for achievement and improvement in community colleges.

Selected from 1,000 public community colleges nationwide, **2017 Aspen Prize winner, Lake Area Technical Institute will receive \$600,000 in prize funds.** Florida's, **Broward College (Fort Lauderdale) and Indian River State College (Fort Pierce) were named Finalists-with-Distinction.** Two Texas schools, **Odessa College (Odessa) and San Jacinto College (Pasadena)** were recognized with the **"Rising Star" award for rapid improvement in student completion:** All four will receive \$100,000 prizes. (See full list of Top Ten Prize Finalists below and read more information about them at <http://as.pn/1kr>.)

"Odessa College has made dramatic improvements over the past several years to help students get and stay on track through graduation," said Joshua Wyner, Executive Director of the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program and author of *What Excellent Community Colleges Do*. "Coming from a graduation rate in the single digits, Odessa set a goal to dramatically improve students' success rates and employed unconventional solutions, such as switching to exclusively 8-week courses and training all faculty to connect with every student every day. And it's worked."

Odessa College serves an isolated region and a large, diverse student body of more than 7,200 who face a multitude of barriers to getting a degree. Many are the first in their families to go to college and most enter academically underprepared for college-level work. Odessa's faculty and staff have worked incredibly hard to improve student retention, completion, and transfer in a number of ways, including: scaling down from 16- to 8-week semesters to help students focus more intently on subjects and enabling them to earn credits over a shorter period of time; training faculty to help students connect deeply to the classroom with simple strategies like shaking students' hands in greeting and more analytical approaches like adjusting instruction based on learning assessments;

and creating better student supports and a unique incentive program that even awards one winner year a hot commodity – a new car.

Among Odessa's outstanding student outcomes that helped earn its recognition for the Rising Star award, include:

- A dramatic increase in annual graduation/transfer rates, from 15% to 32% in just four years
- Five years after graduating, Odessa's 2010 graduates earned more than double the wages of all other workers in the region
- An incredibly low course withdrawal rate of 1.8 percent

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).

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. Aspen's Rising Star winners demonstrate that community colleges can dramatically improve the success of students while in college and in completing a degree that leads to well-paying jobs and careers after college.

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

### **2017 Aspen Prize Winner - Lake Area Technical Institute (Watertown, SD)**

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

***Broward College (Fort Lauderdale, FL)***

***Indian River State College (Fort Pierce, FL)***

#### **Rising Star Award**

***Odessa College (Odessa, TX)***

***San Jacinto College (Pasadena, TX)***

#### **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)***

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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://higher.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).