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## WASHINGTON'S PIERCE COLLEGE FORT STEILACOOM NAMED AMONG 10 FINALISTS FOR 2019 ASPEN PRIZE FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXCELLENCE

*\$1 Million Prize Recognizes Excellence in Community College Student Success  
Outcomes; Winner to be Announced in April 2019*

**Washington, D.C., May 15, 2018** – Washington's Pierce College Fort Steilacoom was named today as one of 10 finalists for the [2019 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence](#), the nation's signature recognition of high achievement and performance in America's community colleges. *(See complete list of finalists below.)*

Awarded every two years since 2011, the Prize recognizes institutions that achieve high and improving student outcomes, selected from over 1,000 community colleges nationwide. Focused solely on student access and success, the Aspen Prize recognizes community colleges with exceptional achievements in four areas:

- Student learning;
- Certificate and degree completion while in community college and after transferring to a four-year institution;
- Employment and earnings rates after graduation; and
- Access for and success of minority and low-income students.

In April 2019, the \$1 million Prize purse will be awarded at an event in Washington, D.C. to the winner, two or three finalists-with-distinction, and a "Rising Star" that has achieved exceptional levels of improvement. Between now and then, Aspen will work with a team of national experts to collect extensive, additional data and conduct multi-day site visits to the 10 finalist colleges.

## **Pierce College at Fort Steilacoom – Lakewood, WA (10,500 Students)**

“Pierce College at Fort Steilacoom has demonstrated its commitment to graduating more students and ensuring that they are well-prepared for jobs through innovative teaching practices in the classroom and intensive advising supports outside the classroom,” said Joshua Wyner, Executive Director of the Aspen Institute’s College Excellence Program in Washington, D.C. “The college’s long-term, persistent efforts to improve have paid off for those who stand to benefit most – its students.”

Pierce College at Fort Steilacoom stands out as one of the nation’s top community colleges for many reasons, including:

- An exceptional three-year graduation/transfer rate of 59 percent, compared to the national average of 40 percent.
- Strong programs to help veterans succeed, including a veterans’ resource center and an educational liaison to help veterans transition into school.
- A scaled structured program to support faculty in improving teaching practice and student learning, offering salary increases to faculty who participate in structured professional development.

Community colleges today enroll about 40 percent of all U.S. undergraduates – six million students – who are working toward earning degrees and certificates. Improving student success across the more than 1,000 community colleges in the U.S. is critical to national efforts to develop talent and enable individual social mobility, because:

- Community colleges disproportionately enroll low-income and minority students enrolled in college today.
- Community college graduation rates remain flat, with fewer than 40 percent of all entering students earning a degree and/or transferring to a four-year college or university.
- A college degree is today more important than ever before: [Recent research](#) shows that out of the 11.6 million jobs created in the post-recession economy, 11.5 million require a college education.

The 10 Aspen Prize Finalists have achieved strong and improving student success rates in very different contexts – they are from rural and urban areas, serve demographically different student bodies, and offer a varied mix of technical workforce and academic transfer programs. These 10 institutions offer proof that every community college can achieve higher levels of success for students while in college and after they graduate.

### **The 2019 Aspen Prize Finalists (listed in alphabetical order):**

- **Alamo Colleges District – Palo Alto College – San Antonio, TX**
  - *First time Finalist*
- **Broward College – Fort Lauderdale, FL**
  - *2017 Finalist-with-Distinction*
  - *2013 Finalist*

- **CUNY Kingsborough Community College – Brooklyn, NY**
  - *2013 Finalist-with-Distinction*
- **Indian River State College – Fort Pierce, FL**
  - *2017 Finalist-with-Distinction*
  - *2015 Finalist*
- **Miami Dade College – Miami, FL**
  - *2011 Finalist-with-Distinction*
- **Mitchell Technical Institute – Mitchell, SD**
  - *First time Finalist*
- **Odessa College – Odessa, TX**
  - *2017 Rising Star Award (for rapid improvement)*
- **Pasadena City College – Pasadena, CA**
  - *2017 Finalist*
- **Pierce College at Fort Steilacoom – Lakewood, WA**
  - *First time Finalist*
- **San Jacinto College – Pasadena, TX**
  - *2017 Rising Star Award (for rapid improvement)*

During the remainder of 2018, the Aspen Institute will complete a rigorous review process that includes examination of data on learning, graduation, workforce, and equitable outcomes for all students as well as multi-day site visits to each of the 10 finalist institutions. In early 2019, a distinguished Prize Jury will select a grand prize winner, finalists-with-distinction, and a Rising Star.

The 2017 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence was awarded to Lake Area Technical Institute in Watertown, South Dakota. Previous Prize winners also include: Santa Fe College, Gainesville, Florida (2015); Santa Barbara City College, Santa Barbara, California and Walla Walla Community College, Walla Walla, Washington (co-winners 2013); Valencia College, Orlando, Florida (2011). Former Prize winners are not eligible to reapply.

**The 2019 Aspen Prize** is generously funded by the Joyce Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, and the Siemens Foundation.

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**The Aspen Institute 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-Aspen Community College STEM Award, 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).