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TEXAS' ODESSA COLLEGE, PALO ALTO COLLEGE (ALAMO COLLEGES DISTRICT), AND SAN JACINTO COLLEGE NAMED AMONG TEN FINALISTS FOR 2019 ASPEN PRIZE FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXCELLENCE

Texas One of Only Two States in US with Multiple Finalists

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

Washington, D.C., May 15, 2018 – Three Texas community colleges – Odessa College, Alamo Colleges District - Palo Alto, and San Jacinto College – were today announced as being among the 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.*)

Since inception of the Aspen Prize in 2011, Texas community colleges have done increasingly well, capturing one finalist slot in 2011 and 2013; two slots in 2015, and two finalist slots plus two "Rising Star" recognitions in 2017. However, this is the first time any single state has seen three of its colleges in the finalist pool.

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.

“I am incredibly impressed by how significantly and constantly these Texas community colleges have improved student success,” said Joshua Wyner, Executive Director of the Aspen College Excellence Program and author of [*What Excellent Community Colleges Do: Preparing All Students for Success*](#). “Odessa and San Jacinto College hit the Prize Jury’s radar last year due to their rapid improvements in student outcomes, earning Rising Star distinctions and \$100,000 awards. Palo Alto stood out during finalist the selection process this year – as did several other colleges in the Alamo system – due to similarly impressive rates of improvement. These three community colleges demonstrate that it is possible to achieve high and improving levels of student success in learning and completion for every student, dispelling the myth that open access and excellent outcomes cannot be attained at the same time.”

Here is a brief summary of some of the factors used by Aspen to select each of the three Texas finalists:

Odessa College – Odessa, TX (7,500 Students)

Odessa College stands out as one of the nation’s top community colleges for many reasons, including:

- Over five years, Odessa has more than doubled its three-year graduation/transfer rates, from 15 percent to 37 percent.
- Impressive labor market outcomes: Five years after graduating, Odessa’s 2010 graduates earned more than double the wages of all other workers in the region.
- Immensely effective classroom engagement techniques that have resulted in course success rates well over 90 percent.
- Innovative eight-week semesters (compared to traditional 16-week semesters) that allow students to focus and tailor their education to their busy schedules.

Alamo Colleges District - Palo Alto College – San Antonio, TX (10,600 Students)

Palo Alto College stands out as one of the nation’s top community colleges for many reasons, including:

- Incredible improvement in three-year graduation/transfer rates from 28 percent in 2011 to 47 percent in 2015.
- A bachelor’s completion rate after its students transfer to a four-year institution that is 8 percentage points higher than the national average.
- Strong pathways and advising systems that result in students taking the right courses, including math courses, which across the country impede many community college students from succeeding.
- Partnerships with eight K-12 school districts to provide up to 60 college credit hours free to high school students.

San Jacinto College – Pasadena, TX (40,500 Students)

San Jacinto College stands out as one of the nation's top community colleges for many reasons, including:

- A 33 percent increase in credentials awarded over the past five years.
- Five years after graduating, San Jacinto College's 2010 graduates earned 28 percent more than all other workers in the region.
- Innovative practices dedicated to improving student learning: Permanent department chairs work closely with faculty members to assess learning techniques and improve course completion, which are factors in faculty performance reviews.
- Development of clear pathways for every degree, aligned with local employer needs and projected job growth in health care, the petrochemical industry, and other fields.

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://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.