

THE 2017
ASPEN PRIZE
FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXCELLENCE



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE



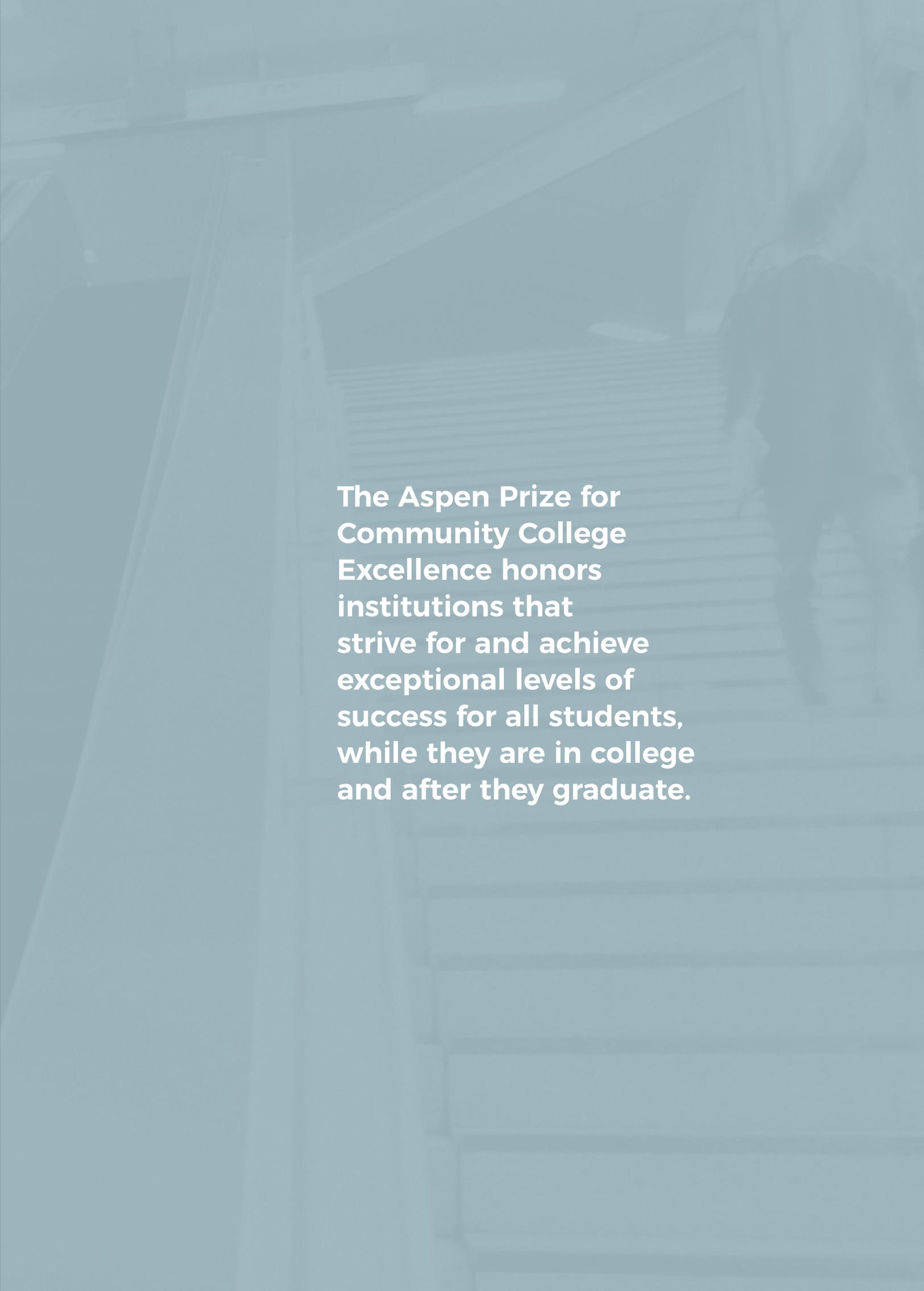
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**The Aspen Prize for
Community College
Excellence honors
institutions that
strive for and achieve
exceptional levels of
success for all students,
while they are in college
and after they graduate.**

A Message From the Executive Director

Over the last decade, the growing recognition that community colleges are vital to our country's social and economic future has led to a sharper focus on their performance. Student demographics are rapidly changing, while the demand for a college-educated workforce expands. At the same time, finances have become more constrained. States across the country have curtailed funding for public higher education while working-class wages—which have still not reached pre-recession levels—have left millions of community college students struggling to balance tuition payments with the need to work and other financial demands.

Against this backdrop, community colleges are being called upon to align their performance with both the needs of students and expectations of the broader public without relying on greater public resources. Political and philanthropic leaders have over the past decade set aggressive completion goals while increasing numbers of states have tied public funding of colleges and universities to student success metrics. And now, it seems, even increasing completion may not be enough. Community colleges are increasingly asked to ensure that students succeed after college in jobs and four-year transfer.

The good news, is that the best community colleges are already improving their performance against this new set of expectations. Top finalists for this year's Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence offer examples of how intentional practice can deliver strong and improving outcomes, aligned to this emerging three-part definition of student success: access + completion + post-graduation success.

- 1. Redefine student success on campus:** Leaders at Prize Winner Lake Area Technical Institute have worked with faculty and staff to redefine success at the college as job placement, not just graduation, and align educational programs and classroom teaching to meet employment goals.
- 2. Partner with four-year colleges and universities to improve transfer and bachelor's attainment:** Administrators and faculty at Finalist with Distinction Broward College have worked to ensure that courses and teaching practices prepare students for junior-year standing in their chosen major, resulting in strong rates of four-year transfer and bachelor's degree attainment rates.
- 3. Engage employers in defining common goals for talent development:** Institutional and program leaders at Finalist with Distinction Indian River State College regularly assess state and regional workforce needs, work with employers to design cutting-edge programs and facilities that replicate workplace conditions, and, in the end, deliver the talented students needed to fuel social mobility and regional economic growth.
- 4. Align student advising systems—including enrollment, program choice, credential maps, and financial aid—to post-graduation goals:** Rising Star co-winner Odessa College has fundamentally reformed the student experience, switching to eight-week semesters, creating a system of “meta-majors,” and establishing comprehensive advising that requires first-year students to choose a program of study with a prescribed sequence of courses.
- 5. Reorient the college culture:** Leaders at the second Rising Star winner, San Jacinto, have over the past seven years built a culture of student success by restructuring the college cabinet, consistently sharing student success data throughout the college, and establishing a distinctive system of faculty development, support, and accountability.

While aggressively pursuing access and completion goals, these exceptional community colleges also ensure that students receive the education they need to be successful in the next stage of their lives, after community college. They understand that doing so is essential if they are to meet the needs of increasingly diverse students and of regional economies while at the same time satisfying expanding public expectations.

The Aspen Institute is proud to recognize the community colleges profiled in this publication. They are working hard to improve what they do so that many more students can graduate every year with the knowledge and skills they will need to advance themselves, their families, and their communities in the years and decades after college.



Joshua Wyner
Executive Director, College Excellence Program, The Aspen Institute

**THE ASPEN INSTITUTE CONGRATULATES THE
TEN FINALISTS FOR THE 2017 ASPEN PRIZE
FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXCELLENCE:**

WINNER:

Lake Area Technical Institute (SD)

FINALISTS WITH DISTINCTION:

Broward College (FL)

Indian River State College (FL)

RISING STAR:

Odessa College (TX)

San Jacinto College (TX)

FINALISTS:

Anoka-Ramsey Community College (MN)

Chaffey College (CA)

Northeast Community College (NE)

Pasadena City College (CA)

West Kentucky Community and Technical College (KY)

PRIOR WINNERS:

Santa Barbara City College (CA)

Santa Fe College (FL)

Valencia College (FL)

Walla Walla Community College (WA)

To see a full list of prior finalists, visit
<http://highered.aspeninstitute.org>.

With the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, the Aspen Institute and its partners aim to further national understanding of how community colleges can increase success for all students. The winning colleges profiled here have shown that what colleges do matters deeply to student achievement.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXCELLENCE?

Excellent community colleges provide students with a high-quality education that motivates them to excel and equips them with the skills and knowledge they will need to succeed in work and life. They continuously improve and demonstrate strength across four domains:

1

COMPLETION AND TRANSFER

High levels of student completion of workforce certificates and two-year degrees, and transfer to four-year colleges resulting in bachelor's degree attainment, as well as institutional practices and policies that promote completion

2

LABOR MARKET

High rates of employment and earnings for graduates, as well as institutional practices and policies aligned with labor market needs and student labor market success

3

LEARNING

Evidence that students learn at high levels, as well as institutional practices and policies that result in strong and improving levels of student learning in courses, within programs, and college-wide

4

EQUITY

High levels of access and success for students who are often underserved, including those from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups and low-income backgrounds, as well as institutional practices and policies aimed at closing achievement gaps

WINNER

LAKE AREA

TECHNICAL

INSTITUTE

WATERTOWN, SD

NUMBER OF
STUDENTS: **1,894**

LOCATION: **TOWN**

45%

STUDENTS RECEIVING
PELL GRANTS

3%

UNDERREPRESENTED
MINORITY STUDENTS

75%

VOCATIONAL/
TECHNICAL AWARDS
(OUT OF ALL AWARDS
CONFERRED)

COMPLETION/ TRANSFER

Two out of three full-time students who begin at LATI graduate or transfer within three years, a rate far above the national average.

74% | **39%**

LATI first-time, full-time students who graduate or transfer within three years

U.S. first-time, full-time students who graduate or transfer within three years

LEARNING

LATI's general education instructors work very closely with workforce faculty to contextualize content in computation, critical thinking, and oral and written communication so it is relevant to each program area. This is an exemplary practice among the nation's technical community colleges.

LABOR MARKET

Five years after graduating, LATI's 2010 graduates earned wages as high as the wages of all other workers in the region.

\$37,559

Annual earnings for employed 2010 graduates of LATI

EQUITY

LATI's exceptional student outcomes are particularly impressive given the significant percentage of low-income students enrolled at the college.

45% | **42%**

LATI first-time, full-time students who receive Pell Grants

U.S. first-time, full-time community college students who receive Pell Grants



LAKE AREA TECHNICAL INSTITUTE (LATI) is a small, robust institution with incredibly deep ties to the economy of eastern South Dakota, a region with a large appetite for employees with a technical education, especially in the areas of agriculture and diesel technology. It is not surprising, then, that 99 percent of graduates are employed in the state after graduation.

LATI leaders have developed an uncommonly coherent system for technical education, one in which industry is more deeply embedded in the campus culture and practices than perhaps anywhere in the country. Students select from a strong and well-developed set of workforce programs that will prepare them with both the technical and soft skills that they will need to secure and succeed in high-demand jobs in the region. Working closely with their technical counterparts, general education faculty contextualize the content of their courses, teaching computation, critical thinking, and oral and written communication skills that are relevant to each program area.

Staff and faculty also collaborate closely with industry representatives, who regularly assess LATI's curriculum to ensure that graduates have the skills they need for high-demand jobs in the state. Local employers work closely with campus leaders to develop valuable internships, fund scholarships, donate sophisticated equipment, and hire LATI students and graduates as interns and



permanent employees. One industry leader remarked, “We hired interns out of the program right away, and we’ve hired more than 40 graduates. The college is incredibly responsive in training students not just for jobs today, but the jobs the region needs in the future.” Employers value LATI graduates and show it with their contributions, which in turn help make graduates even more valuable: robots from a metal manufacturer, funds for a cadaver lab from a healthcare company, and a remote weather station and money to supplement faculty salaries from agriculture companies.

With a deep understanding of what employers expect, the college has developed highly structured programs that support students from intake to employment, keeping them focused on their goals and ensuring their success. When LATI students enroll, they are admitted directly into a program of study, joining a cohort that they will stick with for nearly every course. This cohort model allows students to develop close connections with their peers and instructors, which research shows increases students’ likelihood of persistence and completion.

Given the high proportion of low-income students, one would expect that many LATI students enroll part-time to accommodate a job, but the vast majority of students (85 percent) enrolled at the college attend full-time. With a history of strong employment outcomes, an impeccable reputation in the area, and well-developed supports, LATI students know that their investment of time and money will pay off.

With a deep understanding of what employers expect, the college has developed highly structured programs that support students from intake to employment, keeping them focused on their goals and ensuring their success.



The college has an outstanding record of student success. Eighty percent of students remain enrolled from their first to second year, and 67 percent of students graduate within three years, a percentage three times greater than the national average. As one would expect from an institution

with a deep commitment to workforce development, LATI’s responsibility to its students does not stop at graduation. Faculty and staff ensure that nearly every student who graduates does so with a job. Within just six months of graduation, 99 percent of students are employed or continuing their education.

With such impressive outcomes, it may be no surprise that LATI is the only college to earn the honor of Finalist with Distinction in all three previous cycles of the Aspen Prize. Its top honor for this year’s Prize reflects not only strong overall performance but also a consistent dedication to improving. Over the last several years, even as the college has leveraged a state scholarship program to enroll more low-income students, it has significantly reduced the gap in completion between low-income and other students. The college’s clear pathways and mandatory attendance policy, as well as faculty’s deep personal engagement with every student, have combined to prove that broad access and high levels of student success can go hand in hand. ♦

FINALIST WITH DISTINCTION

BROWARD COLLEGE

FORT LAUDERDALE, FL

NUMBER OF
STUDENTS: **62,508**

LOCATION: **URBAN**

50%

STUDENTS RECEIVING
PELL GRANTS

66%

UNDERREPRESENTED
MINORITY STUDENTS

24%

VOCATIONAL/
TECHNICAL AWARDS
(OUT OF ALL AWARDS
CONFERRED)

BROWARD COLLEGE OUTCOMES

COMPLETION/ TRANSFER

Nearly half of full-time students who begin at Broward graduate or transfer within three years.

47% | **39%**

Broward first-time, full-time students who graduate or transfer within three years

U.S. first-time, full-time students who graduate or transfer within three years

LEARNING

Broward has developed a vibrant assessment culture strengthened by strong administrative support and cross-disciplinary faculty involvement at every level.

LABOR MARKET

Five years after graduating, Broward's 2010 graduates earned wages nearly as high as the wages of all other workers in the region.

\$42,736

Annual earnings for employed 2010 graduates of Broward

EQUITY

At Broward, minority students succeed at rates far above the national average.

46% | **34%**

Broward first-time, full-time underrepresented minority students who graduate or transfer within three years

U.S. first-time, full-time underrepresented minority students who graduate or transfer within three years



BROWARD COLLEGE is a large, highly diverse community college along the southern part of Florida's east coast. The college enrolls a high percentage of low-income and underrepresented minority students, considerably higher than the national average. Broward students often face higher barriers to collegiate success than students at most other community colleges. Rather than use this reality as an excuse, administrators, faculty, and staff ask what more the college can do to ensure student success. That dedication pays off. In recent years, the college has achieved consistently strong student outcomes in retention, completion and transfer, and bachelor's degree attainment.

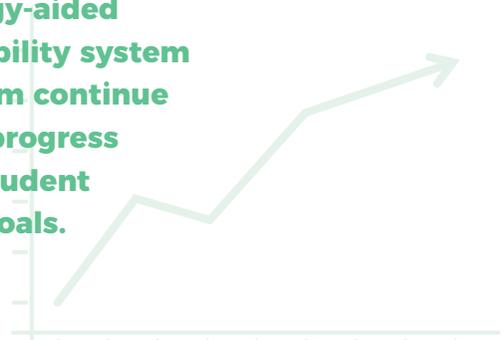
Broward can attribute much of its success to effective reforms, including the development of eight career clusters that offer students clear, supported pathways to a degree. Student services staff work with students to connect them to career clusters, each of which has its own team of faculty and staff. This new structure fosters an environment of collaboration that facilitates student access, retention, and completion, with an ultimate goal of connecting students to the reason they enrolled: post-graduation success in transfer and employment.

Long focused on student transfer success, Broward has built strong collaborative partnerships with six local universities, particularly Florida International University and Florida Atlantic University which, together, receive 80 percent of Broward students who transfer. When students have completed 75 percent of credits required for their Broward degree program, they meet with advisors from Broward and their chosen transfer institution to map a smooth transfer pathway. This and other strategies for partnering with four-year institutions have helped ensure that students meet their bachelor's degree goals.

Broward's guided pathways and related reforms have created a distinctive culture of continuous improvement on campus. Leaders, faculty, and staff across the college understand and take part in achieving the college's access and success goals. This improvement culture may be most clearly seen in Broward's pervasive use of data to improve student success. Individuals across the campus community routinely access data to assess areas of weakness, and a technology-aided accountability system helps them continue to make progress toward student success goals. This college-wide dedication to data-driven decision-making and implementation has led to improvements in not just transfer outcomes but career and technical education offerings and developmental education courses, and impressive equity outcomes. ◆



Individuals across the campus community routinely access data to assess areas of weakness, and a technology-aided accountability system helps them continue to make progress toward student success goals.



FINALIST WITH DISTINCTION INDIAN RIVER STATE COLLEGE

FORT PIERCE, FL

NUMBER OF
STUDENTS: **24,006**

LOCATION: **SUBURBAN**

40%

STUDENTS RECEIVING
PELL GRANTS

34%

UNDERREPRESENTED
MINORITY STUDENTS

38%

VOCATIONAL/
TECHNICAL AWARDS
(OUT OF ALL AWARDS
CONFERRED)

INDIAN RIVER STATE COLLEGE OUTCOMES

COMPLETION/ TRANSFER

Nearly half of full-time students who begin at IRSC graduate or transfer within three years.

49% | **39%**

IRSC first-time, full-time students who graduate or transfer within three years

U.S. first-time, full-time students who graduate or transfer within three years

LABOR MARKET

Five years after graduating, IRSC's 2010 graduates earned wages just above the average wages of all other workers in the region.

\$39,212

Annual earnings for employed 2010 graduates of IRSC

LEARNING

IRSC's workforce programs all include common employability training, ensuring that students who graduate possess both the technical skills and the professional skills needed to excel in their chosen careers.

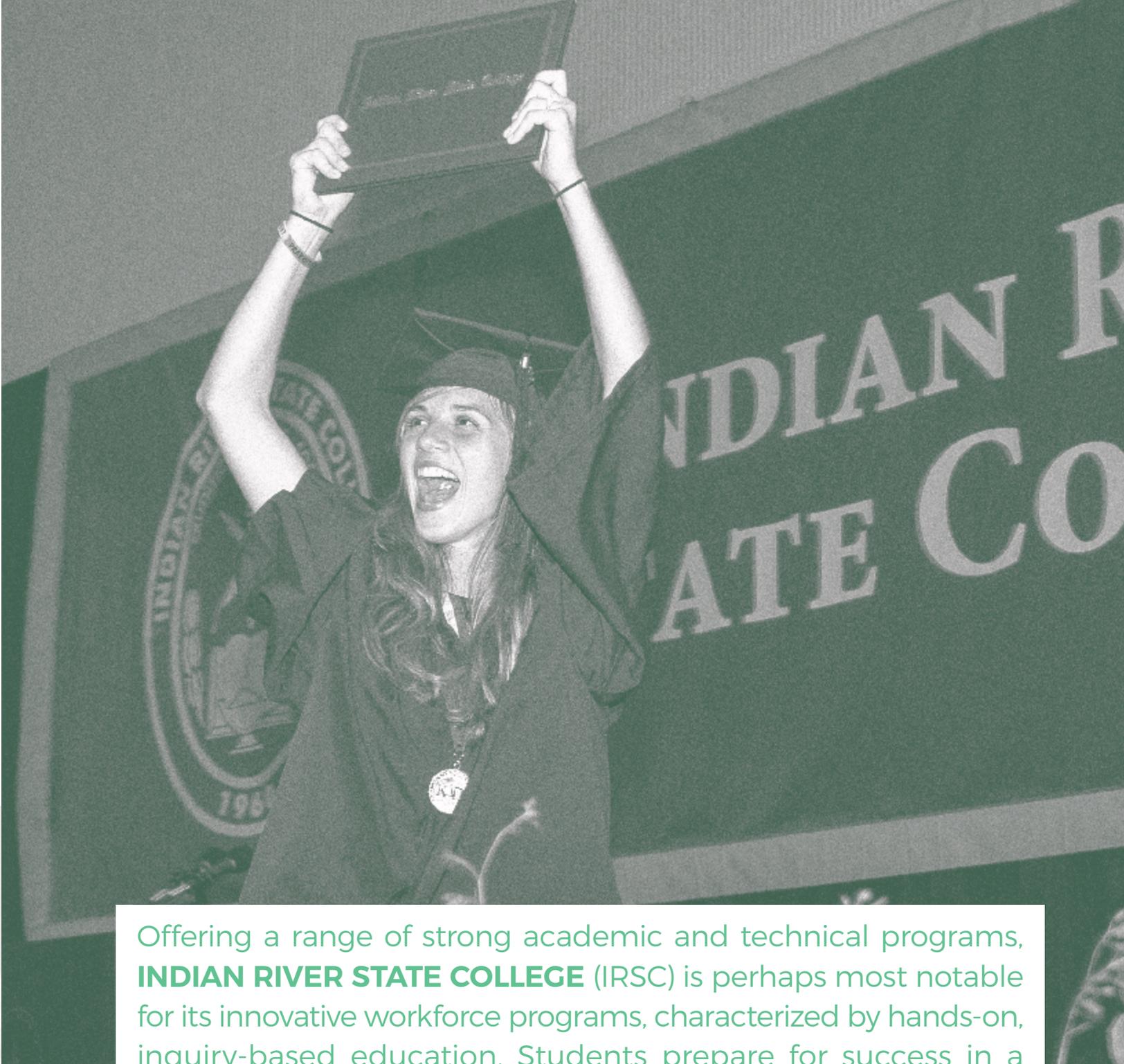
EQUITY

At IRSC, minority students succeed at rates well above the national average.

43% | **34%**

IRSC first-time, full-time underrepresented minority students who graduate or transfer within three years

U.S. first-time, full-time underrepresented minority students who graduate or transfer within three years

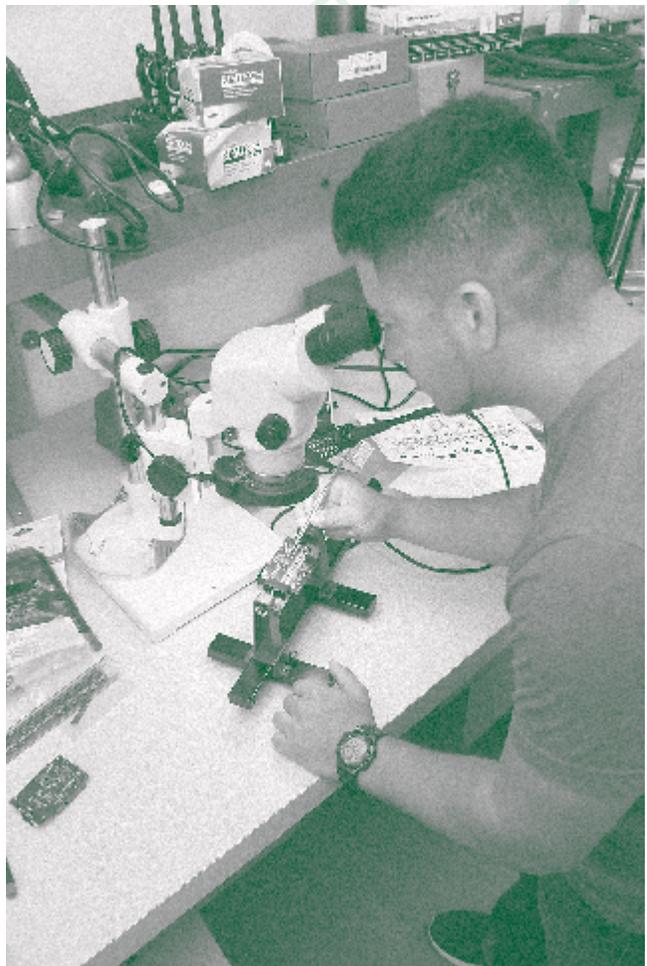


Offering a range of strong academic and technical programs, **INDIAN RIVER STATE COLLEGE** (IRSC) is perhaps most notable for its innovative workforce programs, characterized by hands-on, inquiry-based education. Students prepare for success in a rapidly changing labor market in world-class training facilities using equipment funded (in part) by local industry partners. In the college's health sciences center, nursing and EMT students practice real-world health care scenarios in a simulated hospital ward, and dental hygiene students work with dentists to treat patients in an on-site dental clinic. This combination of hands-on training and industry cooperation has led IRSC's remarkable success at ensuring that graduates are able to obtain and keep in-demand jobs.

IRSC's public safety facilities—in which the college trains many of the region's future firefighters, police officers, corrections officers, and emergency management personnel—have earned national recognition. College leaders collaborated with public officials across the region to develop a sophisticated public safety complex, where students receive a comprehensive education that prepares them for employment immediately after graduation. Students practice testimony in a mock courtroom and incarceration procedures in jail cells. They practice emergency response techniques in outdoor buildings destroyed by simulated natural disasters and in an underwater airplane. The college's hands-on approach not only ensures that students leave IRSC with the technical skills needed for their chosen careers, but also the soft skills that they will need to progress or transition to new career paths, from appropriate interview behavior to being an effective member of a team.

IRSC's focus on students' post-completion goals in academic and career programs alike is reflected in the development of guided program pathways. The college has in recent years developed much clearer pathways to degrees, supported by a thoughtful advising redesign to get students connected to, on track with, and completing programs. That advising doesn't just start when students walk onto campus. Instead, IRSC works closely with high schools to provide students with career advising before they even enter college so that they are college- and career-ready by the time they graduate. ◆

IRSC's focus on students' post-completion goals in academic and career programs alike is reflected in the development of guided program pathways.



RISING STAR

ODESSA COLLEGE



ODESSA, TX

NUMBER OF STUDENTS: **7,255**

LOCATION: **URBAN**

27%

STUDENTS RECEIVING PELL GRANTS

50%

UNDERREPRESENTED MINORITY STUDENTS

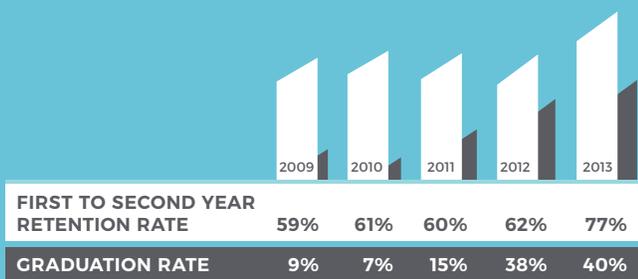
57%

VOCATIONAL/ TECHNICAL AWARDS (OUT OF ALL AWARDS CONFERRED)

ODESSA COLLEGE OUTCOMES

COMPLETION/ TRANSFER

In just five years, Odessa quadrupled the percentage of first-time, full-time students who graduate or transfer within three years.



LEARNING

Odessa faculty consistently improve classroom practice through strategies both personal (shaking students' hands in greeting) and analytical (regular learning assessments), as part of a comprehensive set of teaching interventions aimed at improving student retention, completion, and transfer.

LABOR MARKET

Five years after graduating, Odessa's 2010 graduates earned more than double the wages of all other workers in the region.

\$110,248

Annual earnings for employed 2010 graduates of Odessa

\$54,850

Annual earnings for all workers in the region

EQUITY

Odessa's improved student outcomes are particularly impressive given that half of full-time students enrolled in college for the first time are underrepresented minorities.

50%

Odessa first-time, full-time students who are underrepresented minorities

31%

U.S. first-time, full-time community college students who are underrepresented minorities



ODESSA COLLEGE is defined by a culture where outcomes that are in the best interests of students—notably, completion and preparedness for good, available jobs—drive important institutional decisions, from setting budget priorities to crafting faculty professional development opportunities.

Odessa serves a diverse, isolated West Texas region with low rates of educational attainment. Half of its students are underrepresented minorities, and more than half are first-generation college students. Perhaps because many of the region's readily available jobs in gas and oil industries do not require a college degree, the local government has historically provided little support for higher education.

When President Gregory Williams joined the college in 2006, he dedicated himself to securing resources and reforms on behalf of a student population that deserved greater educational and professional opportunity. At that time, 40 years had passed since the last bond measure to fund campus updates, so President Williams and the board worked hard to win a 2010 bond measure. That bond funded desperately needed upgrades to campus infrastructure and construction of seven new buildings, including a \$14 million student life center. At the same time, President Williams and other Odessa leaders forged new industry partnerships that funded cutting-edge welding and fabrication lab facilities.

Improvement went far beyond these physical developments. The college instituted academic reforms that were bold and quick to scale. Among the first changes, Odessa implemented higher expectations and new accountability measures. Following turnover of one-third of its full-time faculty, campus leaders instituted new faculty hiring practices and professional development that focused on teaching practices associated with improved student outcomes, including engagement strategies that would increase students' sense of belonging. Students also received new supports to help guide them through successful completion of their degrees: a required student success course, comprehensive advising, and mandatory selection in the first year from a system of "meta-majors" with a prescribed sequence of courses.

The continued success of Odessa's comprehensive reforms would not be possible without the college's reliance on strong data practices. As each new student success practice has been implemented, faculty, staff, and leaders have accessed data to monitor its success and, where necessary, enact further

changes. Faculty regularly assess student learning to improve teaching and classroom practices aimed at increasing retention, completion, and transfer. Reflecting huge gains in these areas, the college has improved student success rates much faster than the vast majority of community colleges.

Odessa's completion and transfer outcomes recently eclipsed the national average. The dramatic improvements it has achieved offer important lessons to other community colleges and signal a bright future. The college is well-positioned to continue its internal transformation and to expand K-12, university, and industry partnerships that will benefit students and the region. ♦

Faculty regularly assess student learning to improve teaching and classroom practices aimed at increasing retention, completion, and transfer.



RIISING STAR

SAN JACINTO COLLEGE



PASADENA, TX

NUMBER OF STUDENTS: **40,943**

LOCATION: **SUBURBAN**

30%

STUDENTS RECEIVING PELL GRANTS

56%

UNDERREPRESENTED MINORITY STUDENTS

52%

VOCATIONAL/ TECHNICAL AWARDS (OUT OF ALL AWARDS CONFERRED)

COMPLETION/ TRANSFER

Over a five-year period, San Jacinto increased the percentage of first-time, full-time students who graduate or transfer within three years from 29 to 36 percent.

LEARNING

San Jacinto faculty receive strong professional development on improving course completion rates—including routine coaching from department chairs on classroom practices—and faculty are held accountable for students' success.

LABOR MARKET

Five years after graduating, San Jacinto's 2010 graduates earned 28% more than all other workers in the region.

\$88,577

Annual earnings for employed 2010 graduates of San Jacinto

\$69,201

Annual earnings for all workers in the region

EQUITY

San Jacinto's student outcomes are particularly impressive given that over half of full-time students enrolled in college for the first time are underrepresented minorities, well above the national average.

56%

San Jacinto first-time, full-time students who are underrepresented minorities

31%

U.S. first-time, full-time community college students who are underrepresented minorities



With three campus locations and over 40,000 students, **SAN JACINTO** is a large, complex institution that nonetheless maintains the best characteristics of much smaller colleges. Students describe the faculty and staff as respectful, supportive, and accessible, and faculty exhibit uncommon concern for students' success, recognizing that they have a responsibility to improve student outcomes.

A majority of San Jacinto's students are underrepresented minorities, many are the first in their family to attend college, and over half enter needing remedial coursework. Yet San Jacinto's graduates thrive, significantly out-earning other workers in the region five years after graduation.

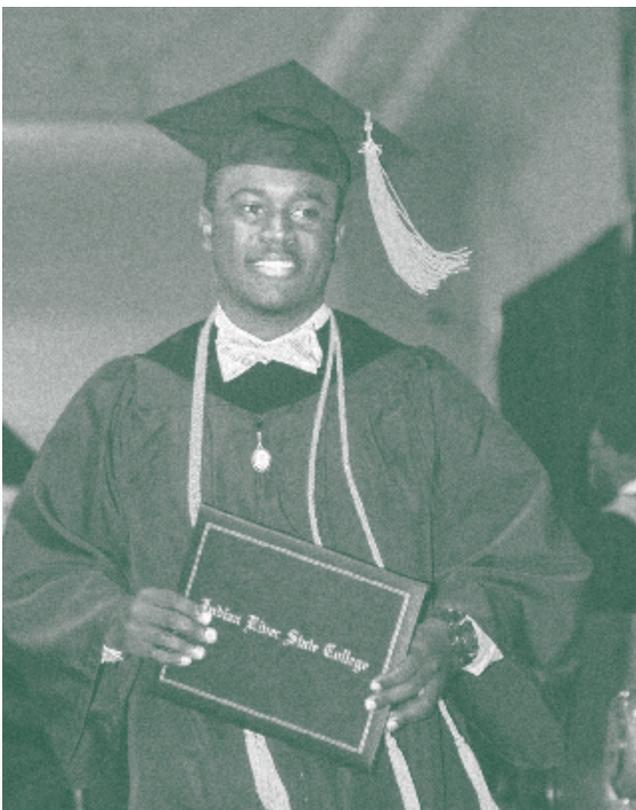
Under Chancellor Brenda Hellyer, San Jacinto has built the capacity for scaled reform. When Hellyer assumed her post in 2009, she began a sustained campaign to increase trust and focus on student outcomes. Since then, she has redesigned the college's management structure, hired new leaders across all three campuses, and instituted an effective accountability system. Although one would expect that such restructuring might make it difficult to build a cohesive campus culture, the opposite is true: San Jacinto's senior leaders, faculty, and staff work collaboratively to continue advancing student outcomes.

With clear expectations and accountability for improving student outcomes in place, San Jacinto has enacted several critical reforms. Among the most influential was a redesign of faculty professional development that aimed to improve student learning and course completion. San Jacinto hired full-time permanent department chairs and trained them in how to coach faculty. The chairs work with faculty on how to analyze student data and use teaching practices that lead to improved outcomes. They began to hold faculty accountable for course-level outcomes.

These reforms and others in developmental math, mandatory advising, and (more recently) designing clearer degree pathways have resulted in steady improvements in course completion and graduation. With a completion and transfer rate just now reaching the national average, leaders recognize that they must continue to improve, and at a faster rate. But at a college that just seven years ago had not developed a clear student success agenda, rapid increases in student success along with a unified sense of purpose to continue improving signal more gains to come. ♦

A DEDICATION TO POST-COMPLETION SUCCESS

ASPEN PRIZE FINALISTS know how important it is to keep their doors wide open to students who might not otherwise have the opportunity to go to college. And they know that it means little to open their doors unless they also help students graduate with a degree or other valuable credential. While distinct in their capacity to succeed in the twin goals of access and completion, what is most striking among this year's finalists is the degree to which colleges also focus on post-completion success. Whether their students are continuing their education at a four-year college or directly entering the labor market, Aspen Prize finalists excel at putting students and graduates in a position to succeed.



Throughout four cycles of the Aspen Prize, we have recognized community colleges across the country for striving to provide access to educational opportunity and family-sustaining wages. We have lauded colleges that have achieved impressive learning and completion outcomes, with special attention paid to those that have succeeded in narrowing and in some cases closing equity gaps. And we have focused equally intently on achievements in students' labor market outcomes.

Over the past decade, state and federal governments, philanthropists, and other higher education organizations have shared our commitment to see students succeed after college, calling upon colleges to make post-completion an important focus of their work by holding them accountable for labor market outcomes. Although some colleges are at different stages of creating and implementing a post-completion agenda, Prize finalists express a responsibility to their students that does not end at graduation and have taken great strides to fulfill that obligation—to provide all students, no matter their backgrounds, the opportunity to succeed during and after college.

Improving completion rates

If institutions are to achieve positive post-completion outcomes, they must work to improve completion rates for all students. Whether a student graduates from community college with an associate's degree has implications for that student's life after community college. Students who complete an associate's degree are more likely to complete a bachelor's degree too. Completion of a degree or certificate has also been tied to strong labor market outcomes, both immediately after college and later in students' careers. With these outcomes in mind, Aspen Prize finalists' recent work to improve completion rates has been more holistic than we have seen in prior Prize cycles.

The work of Prize finalists makes clear that a new reform concept is taking hold. No longer is it enough to reform developmental education, or improve student academic supports, or create wrap-around social services. Those initiatives remain core to improvement, but they cannot be isolated. Instead, top colleges in this year's Prize process understand that achieving consistent improvements in student success over time requires unified leadership and rethinking how the college is organized and functions at all levels.

While many finalists have engaged in holistic reforms—including three engaged in guided pathways redesign—two in particular offer important lessons for the field on how to improve graduation rates. Rising Star co-winners Odessa and San Jacinto have followed different strategies but have made similarly stellar improvements in student success.

Driven by exceptional leadership, San Jacinto has dedicated itself over the last several years to improving outcomes for students, from the course level to institution-wide. The college has restructured department leadership and designed robust ongoing faculty professional development. It has also implemented guided pathways to degrees, along with stronger student supports. Thanks to these and other changes, San Jacinto's three-year graduation and transfer rate for first-time, full-time students has increased from 29 to 36 percent over five years.

The graduation and transfer rate at Odessa College has improved even more dramatically, increasing from 9 percent to 40 percent in just five years. The college employs AVID, a national program that aims to increase college readiness and success among at-risk students. Faculty and staff are trained in effective

Faculty and staff are trained in effective intervention practices and to use engagement techniques to connect with students, including shaking their hands as they leave class and saying, "I'll see you tomorrow morning."

intervention practices and to use engagement techniques to connect with students, including shaking their hands as they leave class and saying, "I'll see you tomorrow morning." Perhaps most importantly, the college moved to an eight-week semester based on evidence at other colleges that students were more engaged and more likely to persist when they

could focus on fewer subjects at a time. These college-wide reforms have yielded very strong improvements in both degree completion and course completion rates for all students. For example, Hispanic men, white men, part-time students, and full-time students now all pass courses at rates between 78 percent and 80 percent.

This year's Prize winner, Lake Area Technical Institute, and the two finalists with distinction, Broward College and Indian River State College, have engaged for even longer than the Rising Star winners in improving student success, achieving impressive gains in completion in recent years. With that work well-established, however, they have also engaged in efforts that can help other community colleges understand how to take student success reforms to the next level. They have developed cultures that focus as much on what students accomplish after college as while they are on campus.

Transfer and bachelor's degree attainment

Student transfer outcomes at Broward are above the national average by every measure. Forty-one percent of Broward students transfer to a four-year institution, compared to 24 percent nationally. Among students who transfer, 46 percent complete a bachelor's degree, compared to 42 percent nationally.

These outcomes are particularly impressive given the demographics of Broward's student body. Half of Broward's students have family incomes low enough to qualify for a federal Pell grant, and two-thirds are from underrepresented minority groups—a proportion that's twice the national average and much higher than the area the college serves. At Broward, those students persist and complete college at rates consistently above the national average.

... it is likely that Broward's long-standing work to improve students' associate's degree completion rate has contributed to students' transfer success.

To help such diverse students succeed, the college has developed strong transfer practices with area universities, most notably Florida International University (FIU) and Florida Atlantic University (FAU), where four out of five Broward four-year transfers matriculate. Broward has developed clear pathways to a bachelor's degree for programs in both universities. Faculty and staff work regularly with their counterparts at FIU and FAU to align their curricula so that credits transfer more easily and students are prepared to continue their education at the university on the first day of their junior year. When Broward students on a path to transfer have completed 75 percent of their degree program, they meet with advisors from both Broward and their transfer university.

Given the demonstrated connection in research between earning an associate's degree and subsequent attainment of a bachelor's degree, it is likely that Broward's long-standing work to improve students' associate's degree completion rate has contributed to students' transfer success. Of those who transfer from Broward, 28 percent complete their associate's degree before leaving, well above the Aspen Prize applicant average (16 percent).

The college's impressive completion outcomes reflect a deep and broad commitment to leave no student behind. Broward serves a high proportion of underrepresented minority students and students placing into developmental education, factors linked to decreased rates of persistence and completion. Yet Broward has achieved strong outcomes for all of its students, closing many achievement gaps. The graduation and transfer rate for underrepresented minority students is 46 percent, compared to 50 percent for white students. To increase persistence and completion of underprepared students, Broward improved the design and delivery of developmental education, introducing a flipped classroom model—in which students watch lectures on video at home and do more hands-on work in class—and, like other finalist colleges, compressing courses from 16 weeks to eight. Outcomes for students in developmental English, reading, and particularly math have improved substantially.

Labor market success

Four-year transfer and bachelor's attainment are means to a goal that virtually every community college student shares: a good job with strong wages. Many students don't want or need to wait until they get a bachelor's degree to land such a job—it is available immediately after completing community college. While most

community colleges acknowledge the importance of ensuring that their graduates succeed in their regional labor markets, many of this year's Prize finalists have created the kind of symbiotic relationship with employers that fuels economic opportunity and growth through the development of exceptional talent.

Despite a higher-than-average unemployment rate in the region around Indian River State College (IRSC), labor market outcomes for IRSC graduates are very strong. Not only is the employment rate high, but so is the average salary: Five years after graduation, IRSC graduates earn just above the average for all workers in the region.

So how does IRSC ensure that students succeed after graduation? IRSC's senior leaders and the heads of programs regularly review labor market projections and discuss labor market trends with employers. Based on these reviews, the college consistently makes changes to program design and offerings to ensure that the degrees and courses offered are aligned to current and future



Five years after graduation, IRSC graduates earn just above the average for all workers in the region.

labor market demand. Leaders also collaborate with employers across industry sectors to design cutting-edge facilities that replicate working conditions and will prepare students for not only current jobs but the jobs of tomorrow.

Over time, IRSC college and program leaders came to understand that providing students with technical skills is not enough for success in their chosen career path. So, to ensure that students learn the professional skills they will need to thrive in a rapidly changing labor market, the college developed an employability module for every career and technical program. The college teaches students how to contact potential employers, write resumes, and decide among potential careers during an annual Employability Week.

Perhaps no finalist offers a better example of dedication to its students' labor market preparation and success than Lake Area Technical Institute (LATI). Ninety-nine percent of LATI graduates are employed within six months of graduation, and, in the year after they graduate, they earn wages more than 25 percent higher than other new hires in the region. Key to LATI's success is the integration of all of the college's work—both on campus and off—towards the singular goal of ensuring students' post-completion success.

At LATI, general and technical education faculty are extremely collaborative, each helping the other shape what students learn in the classroom so that students receive the wide-ranging skills they will need as their jobs change. LATI contextualizes these soft skills, and research shows that contextualized learning increases motivation and learning. In every program, students must apply theory through hands-on work within the first three weeks of each semester. College leaders attribute the high success rates to this dedication to experiential learning, which research suggests can have a positive influence on retention.

LATI also looks to its off-campus partners to support students' post-completion success. Program faculty regularly communicate with industry representatives to design curricula aimed at teaching students up-to-date skills for high-demand jobs with strong wages. Reflecting their reliance on LATI for talented workers, regional employers invest substantial financial resources in LATI's programs, including for expensive equipment to help students learn in a real-world setting and funds for student scholarships. LATI's high employment rate is proof that the investments of employers, students, and the entire LATI community have paid off.



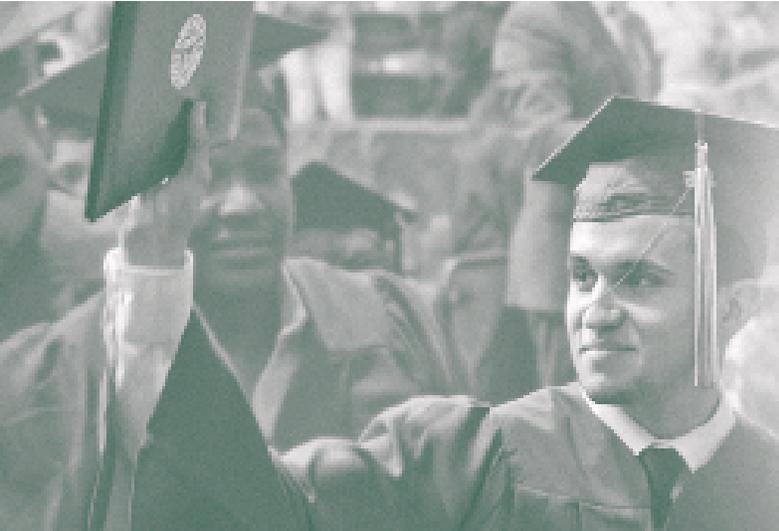
Nearly half of LATI students receive Pell grants, so the college's leaders monitor achievement gaps for low-income students and asks how LATI can achieve better outcomes.

At LATI, achieving strong outcomes means paying attention to every student. Nearly half of LATI students receive Pell grants, so the college's leaders monitor achievement gaps for low-income students and asks how LATI can achieve better outcomes. The college has over the past few years utilized its strong program pathways, bolstered advising structures, and leveraged a substantial new state scholarship program to halve the gap in graduation rates between Pell and other students. Given the strong labor market outcomes for all graduates, this means dramatically expanded opportunity for LATI students who may need it most. With disaggregated data in hand, the college has begun to ask important questions about how it can better help other groups of students, including online students, veterans, and students who, based on their gender, are underrepresented in some fields.

Reorganizing to meet the goal of post-completion success

Having started with the end in mind—bachelor's attainment and jobs—exceptional community colleges are reorganizing their educational programs to more clearly align with those ends. Many Aspen finalists have redesigned programs of study based on the principle of guided pathways. In a guided pathways structure, a student chooses a program of study and heads down

What distinguishes the 2017 Prize Winner, Finalists with Distinction, and Rising Stars is their drive and capacity to continuously improve entire colleges in ways that measurably benefit students. With students front and center, they have redefined what college excellence means to them.



a streamlined path that allows for fewer choices—and thus fewer wrong turns—than with a conventional program model.

With clearer degree pathways, students are coached to select the educational path that is right for them, advised to stay on track from intake through graduation, and educated to enter the job market or a four-year institution with the skills needed for success. Three of the 2017 Aspen Prize finalists are among 30 community colleges participating in a national effort by the American Association of Community Colleges to help community colleges across the country develop guided pathways.

Partnering with local employers and university partners, Broward College has created pathways to degrees and credentials along eight career trajectories, including education, business, and health science. Each of the eight pathways represents a community with unique student services and advising supports. Given the importance of early goal-setting in students' educational outcomes, the college also recently implemented a comprehensive redesign of its intake process, including admissions, new student orientation, program selection, advising, student support, and developmental education.

At San Jacinto College, in addition to mandatory orientation and advising for all first-time freshmen, all students who have accumulated between 22 and 27 credits must meet with their advisors. Students must also take a student success course that teaches them study skills, such as time management, and provides career assessment and advising. Students work with the

instructor to plan their educational paths and set goals, preparing them for success throughout their college careers.

Indian River State College too requires students to attend advising sessions—at registration and again when they are one-quarter, one-half, and three-quarters of the way toward completing their degrees. Between those critical checkpoints, faculty use an early alert system to flag any student whose performance or attendance indicates they need additional advising support. Advising at IRSC doesn't start only when students walk onto campus, however, IRSC has also partnered with area high schools to design onboarding systems that help high school students learn about and explore careers. IRSC advisors collaborate with high school teachers to monitor students' progress along their pathways and provide college support when students are at risk of falling off track. Broward has a similar initiative called Jumpstart, which currently operates in nine area high schools but will likely soon expand to all 39 Broward County public high schools.

Prize finalist colleges implementing guided pathways have seen positive results. For example, since introducing guided pathways just two years ago, IRSC has increased the share of first-year students returning for their second year to 68 percent, compared to a national average of 52 percent. The college has also reduced students' ability to accumulate credits they don't need—a practice that increases costs and can stand in the way of getting a degree. Such early progress reflects the value of mobilizing a strong culture to implement the guided pathways framework. Individuals across the IRSC community understand and are invested in the college's goals.

In many ways, finalists for the Aspen Prize are similar to other community colleges. They educate all who come through their doors. They work hard to make college affordable. And their faculty, staff, and senior administrators' commitment to student access and success can be found at community colleges elsewhere in the country.

What distinguishes the 2017 Prize Winner, Finalists with Distinction, and Rising Stars is their drive and capacity to continuously improve entire colleges in ways that measurably benefit students. With students front and center, they have redefined what college excellence means to them. And, in turn, they serve as important examples for other community colleges nationwide to understand how to advance student success in ways that improves students' lives and communities in the decades after graduation. ◆

DATA CITED IN THIS REPORT ARE DRAWN FROM FEDERAL AND STATE DATA SETS DESCRIBED ON PAGE 30.

HOW DID WE SELECT THE WINNERS?

ROUND 1

From over 1,000 community colleges to 152 eligible.

Aspen convened a national panel of community college experts, which devised a formula—based on national data on performance and improvement in student completion, as well as completion for underrepresented racial and ethnic groups—to assess every U.S. public two-year college and identify 152 eligible to apply for the Prize.

ROUND 2

From 152 eligible to 10 finalists.

Aspen invited each eligible institution to submit an application, and convened a selection committee of higher education experts to select 10 finalists from among 104 applications submitted. The committee identified the finalists based on Round 1 data and information from applications, including institutional data on completion, labor market, and learning outcomes, disaggregated by race and ethnicity; descriptions of how institutions have achieved and improved student outcomes; and, for 49 colleges, interviews with the leadership teams.

ROUND 3

From 10 finalists to a winner, finalists with distinction, and Rising Stars

Aspen collected unique data sets, including data from states on graduates' employment rates and earnings and from the National Student Clearinghouse on four-year completion and transfer, and conducted two-day site visits to the 10 finalist institutions.

A prize jury of prominent former government officials, national business and civil rights leaders, and community college experts reviewed the quantitative and qualitative information gathered in each of the three rounds to select a Winner, Finalists with Distinction, and Rising Stars.

To assess the four elements of excellence—completion and transfer, labor market, learning, and equitable outcomes—the Aspen Institute collects quantitative and qualitative data about the finalist colleges from multiple sources.

QUANTITATIVE DATA

THE INTEGRATED POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION DATA SYSTEM (IPEDS)

- Credentials awarded per 100 FTE (including both full-time and part-time students)
 - > For all students
 - > For underrepresented minority students
- Three-year graduation/transfer rate
 - > For all students
 - > For underrepresented minority students
- Retention rate (first to second year)
- Improvement over five years on three measures: retention rate, three-year graduation/transfer rate, credentials awarded per 100 FTE
- Achievement gap

NATIONAL STUDENT CLEARINGHOUSE

- Four-year transfer rate
- Bachelor's degree completion rate

INSTITUTIONAL DATA

- Workforce outcomes based on surveys
- Six-year completion and transfer outcomes

STATE UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE RECORDS MATCHED WITH INSTITUTIONAL COHORT DATA

- Class of 2010 employment information
 - > Job placement rate one year and five years after graduation
 - > Rate of continuous employment
 - > Annualized salaries and wages five years after graduation
- Class of 2014 employment information
 - > Job placement rate at graduation and one year after graduation
 - > Rate of continuous employment
 - > Annualized salaries and wages one year after graduation

QUALITATIVE DATA

- Assessment of Peter Ewell and Marianne Boeke (NCHEMS) regarding how the institution collects and uses information about student learning to improve learning outcomes
- Assessment of expert site visitors based on information collected during site visits including (1) meetings with institutional leaders, professors, department chairs, deans, staff, students, and employers, and (2) documents submitted by each institution, including strategic plans, accreditation reports, and program review reports

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

Because community colleges work with many different student populations in communities with varying challenges, Aspen collects a significant amount of contextual data to share with the Finalist Selection Committee and Prize Jury.

THE INTEGRATED POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION DATA SYSTEM (IPEDS)

- Percentage of students attending part-time
- Percentage of vocational/technical awards (out of all awards conferred)
- Percentage of non-traditional age students (25 & older)
- Percentage of underrepresented minority students (disaggregated by African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students)
- Percentage of Pell Grant recipients

U.S. CENSUS

- Percentage of students entering needing remedial education
- Median family income of service area
- Urbanicity
- Percentage of underrepresented minorities in the service area
- Average annual county new hire wage

U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS

- County unemployment rate
- County five-year employment change rate
- Average annual county wage

INSTITUTIONAL DATA

- Percentage of students entering needing remedial education

We are deeply grateful to everyone who contributed to the analytic work and selection processes that led to the selection of the 2017 Aspen Prize Winner, Finalists with Distinction, Rising Stars, and Finalists.

PRIZE JURY

We offer our sincere appreciation to the Prize Jury, which thoughtfully deliberated and selected the winner and commended institutions from among the ten finalist community colleges.

MITCHELL E. DANIELS, JR., (Co-chair) President, Purdue University; former Governor, Indiana

THE HONORABLE GEORGE MILLER, (Co-chair), former U.S. Representative, California

THOMAS BAILEY, Director, Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University

JOHN C. HARVEY, JR., Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs, Office of the Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia; former Admiral, U.S. Navy

MARTHA KANTER, Executive Director, College Promise Campaign; Senior Fellow, Steinhardt Institute of Higher Education Policy, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development, New York University; former Under Secretary, U.S. Department of Education

DAVID LEONHARDT, Writer, Editor, Op-Ed Columnist, *The New York Times*

SHIRLEY MALCOLM, Director, Education and Human Resources Programs, American Association for the Advancement of Science

ERICKA MILLER, Vice President, Isaacson, Miller

JON SCHNUR, Executive Chairman, America Achieves

JUAN SEPÚLVEDA, Senior Vice President, Station Services, PBS; former Senior Advisor for Hispanic Affairs, Democratic National Committee; former Executive Director, White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics

DATA/METRICS ADVISORY PANEL, ROUND 1

The Data/Metrics Advisory Panel, with technical support from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), built upon last year's formula to devise an even stronger method of evaluating all U.S. community colleges and select colleges eligible to apply for the Aspen Prize. We greatly appreciate the efforts of the Data/Metrics Advisory Panel:

KEITH BIRD, Senior Fellow, Corporation for a Skilled Workforce

ROB JOHNSTONE, Founder & President, National Center for Inquiry & Improvement

PATRICK KELLY, Vice President, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems

JON O'BERGH, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of the Under Secretary, U.S. Department of Education

KENT PHILLIPPE, Associate Vice President, Research and Student Success, American Association of Community Colleges

JEFF STROHL, Director of Research, McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce

ASPEN PRIZE DATA

FINALIST SELECTION COMMITTEE, ROUND 2

The Finalist Selection Committee identified ten institutions that aim to deliver exceptional student results in completion and transfer, labor market, learning, and equitable outcomes. Many thanks for the hard work and thoughtful analysis of the committee:

KATHY BOOTH, Senior Research Associate, WestEd

KIMBERLY GREEN, Executive Director, Advance CTE: State Leaders Connecting Learning to Work

MEREDITH ARCHER HATCH, Senior Associate Director for Workforce and Academic Alignment, Achieving the Dream, Inc.

ALFRED HERRERA, Assistant Vice Provost, Academic Partnerships & Director, Center for Community College Partnerships, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)

MARC HERZOG, Chancellor Emeritus, Connecticut Community College System

ROBERT JOHNSTONE, Founder & President, National Center for Inquiry & Improvement

MELINDA KARP, Assistant Director, Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University

AMY LAITINEN, Director of Higher Education, New America Foundation

NANCY POPPE, Campus President for the Extended Learning Campus (ret.), Portland Community College

LASHAWN RICHBURG-HAYES, Director of Higher Education, New America Foundation

GRETCHEN SCHMIDT, Executive Director, Pathways Project, American Association of Community Colleges

NICOLE SMITH, Chief Economist, McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce

HEATHER WATHINGTON, Chief Executive Officer, Maya Angelou Schools and the See Forever Foundation

JANE WELLMAN, Senior Advisor, College Futures Foundation

SITE VISITORS, ROUND 3

Teams of experienced researchers and practitioners conducted two-day site visits to each of the ten finalist institutions to gather qualitative research. Special thanks to our site visitors:

ELAINE DELOTT BAKER, Consultant, Baker Communications, Inc.; former Acceleration Specialist, Colorado Online Energy Training Consortia, Colorado Community College System

DARLA COOPER, Director of Research and Evaluation, The Research & Planning Group for California Community Colleges (The RP Group)

MARC HERZOG, Chancellor Emeritus, Connecticut Community College System

ROBERT JOHNSTONE, Founder & President, National Center for Inquiry & Improvement

ROBERT TEMPLIN, Senior Fellow, Aspen Institute College Excellence Program; President Emeritus, Northern Virginia Community College

JOSHUA WYNER, Executive Director, Aspen Institute College Excellence Program

Gingle Lee, Millicent Bender, Hannah Lauber, Karthik Ilakkuvan, and Chelsea Howard who contributed extensively throughout the Prize administration, documentation, and analysis deserve our deep appreciation for their thoughtful work.

In addition, we greatly appreciate the efforts of Dr. Peter Ewell, Dr. Patrick Kelly, Dr. Marianne Boeke, John Clark, and Rachel Christeson of NCHEMS, who collected and analyzed information on student completion and retention rates, learning outcomes assessments, and labor market outcomes.

We would also like to thank our colleagues at the American Association of Community Colleges and the Association of Community College Trustees and our communications partners at Burness Communications, who have been valuable partners in communicating the importance of community college excellence and the value of the Prize.

Last, but not least, Margaret Miller served as an exceptionally thoughtful partner, traveling with the site visit team, facilitating assessment conversations, and writing Prize Jury reports. Sadly, Margaret passed away unexpectedly in early 2017. As much as her partnership, Margaret's dedication to community colleges and the students they serve will be greatly missed.

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE is an educational and policy studies organization based in Washington, D.C. 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, D.C.; 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.

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