



**2019 ASPEN PRIZE FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXCELLENCE AWARDED TO FLORIDA'S INDIAN RIVER STATE COLLEGE AND MIAMI DADE COLLEGE**

*\$1 Million Prize Recognizes Excellence in Equitable Outcomes for Students During and After College; Odessa College and Palo Alto colleges in Texas and Pierce College in Washington recognized as Rising Stars*

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**WASHINGTON, D.C., April 2, 2019** —The Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program announced today that **Indian River State College** (Fort Pierce, Florida) and **Miami Dade College** (Miami) are the winners of the 2019 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, the nation's signature recognition of high achievement and performance among America's community colleges.

The \$1 million Aspen Prize, awarded every two years since 2011, recognizes outstanding institutions selected from an original pool of more than 1,000 community colleges nationwide. With a singular focus on student success, the Aspen Prize assesses institutional performance in four areas: student learning, certificate and degree completion, success after graduation in the labor market and in transfer to four-year institutions, and equity in access and success for students of color and low-income students.

"Excellent community colleges like these are dedicated to finding the best ways to foster social mobility for their students and develop talent for their communities," said Josh Wyner, executive director of the College Excellence Program and an Aspen Institute vice president. "Indian River has among the strongest graduation rates for both associate degrees and bachelor's degrees in the nation. Miami Dade works tirelessly on reforms that have improved the graduation rate and virtually erased the achievement gap for student of color. Most importantly, the data make clear both community colleges do a great job of preparing student for what comes next, whether that be pursuit of a bachelor's degree or landing a good job."

Aspen also awarded three colleges with the "Rising Star" award for their strong record of improvement: **Odessa College** (Odessa, Texas), **Palo Alto College** (San Antonio, Texas), and **Pierce College at Fort Steilacoom** (Lakewood, Washington). All three will be awarded \$100,000, while the two winners, Indian River and Miami Dade, will receive \$350,000 each. (See the full list of the 10 Aspen Prize finalists below and read more about them at: <https://bit.ly/2FK6HkM>).

The winners, Rising Stars, and finalists were announced at an event at the Newseum in Washington, D.C., by Aspen Prize jury co-chairs Ángel Cabrera, president of George Mason University, and Kathy Warden, chief executive officer and president of Northrop Grumman. Cabrera and Warden led a distinguished jury of education, business, and civil rights 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, along with multiday site visits to each of the 10 finalist colleges.

“Community colleges enroll nearly 40 percent of all U.S. undergraduates – that’s 6 million students working towards degrees and certificates, most of whom strive to earn a bachelor’s degree,” said Cabrera. “As a leader of a four-year institution, I am encouraged to see the many ways Aspen Prize finalists have designed thoughtful approaches to make sure students are well prepared for transfer.”

“The exceptional community colleges being honored today are helping to provide students with opportunities through strong workforce programs,” said Warden. “These colleges are focused on ensuring that student success extends beyond graduation through high rates of employment, and they are engaging employers and aligning their programs to meet the needs of local and regional economies.”

The 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,” said Wyner.

### **Aspen Prize Winner – Indian River State College (Fort Pierce, FL) – 24,300 students**

An Aspen Prize finalist in 2015 and a Finalist-with-Distinction in 2017, Indian River State College has proven its ability to sustainably improve student success rates at scale and has developed a student-focused culture that makes it likely that it will continue to build upon its successes and address challenges. Strong outcomes are the result of two strategic efforts at IRSC. The first is to provide strong guidance so that students develop academic plans clearly mapping a path to transfer without losing time or credits. The second is IRSC’s bold decision to build 17 of its own bachelor’s degree programs. IRSC leaders recognized the need—very real in the semirural location on Florida’s eastern coast more than 60 miles from a four-year university—to create educational opportunities beyond the two-year degree. The result: large numbers of students transfer “internally,” including many who may not have otherwise considered pursuing a four-year degree.

Student outcomes:

- IRSC has a 56 percent transfer rate, compared to the national average of 32 percent
- IRSC has a 52 percent bachelor’s attainment rate for students who go on to pursue a bachelor’s degree, compared to the national average transfer rate of 42 percent

- IRSC alumni earn \$41,492 on average five years after graduation, compared to the \$38,714 average salary of all regional workers

### **Aspen Prize Winner – Miami Dade College (Miami, FL) – 96,000 students**

Miami Dade, a Finalist-with-Distinction for the Aspen Prize in 2011, provides a clear path to economic and social mobility for its students. The college is geographically dispersed, across eight campuses, and demographically diverse. Nearly three-quarters of students are Hispanic and 16 percent are Black. The college enrolls more than 17,000 immigrant students each year from more than 150 countries. The vast majority of students come from low-income households and are the first in their families to attend college. Against this backdrop, Miami Dade College plays a critical and inspirational role in providing an on-ramp to higher education for students who may otherwise have never found one. In pursuit of providing all students an exceptional learning opportunity, the college has transformed the student experience over the past decade by building clear program maps, redesigning academic and nonacademic supports, improving developmental education, and strengthening faculty professional development.

Student outcomes:

- Miami Dade has a 43 percent graduation and transfer rate for students of color, compared to the national average of 35 percent
- Miami Dade has a 47 percent bachelor's attainment rate for transfer students, compared to the national average of 42 percent
- Miami Dade alumni earn \$51,898 on average five years after graduation, compared to the \$51,260 average salary of all regional workers

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

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

- The combined graduation and transfer rate for first-time, full-time students has increased from 15 percent to 36 percent over the past five years. The number of students withdrawing from courses has hit a record low of 1.8 percent, and three-year graduation and transfer rates more than doubled in just five years.

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

- The combined graduation and transfer rate for first time full-time students has climbed by nearly 20 percentage points, from 28 percent to 47 percent.

Pierce College at Fort Steilacoom (Lakewood, WA) – 10,430 students

- There have been steady increases in student retention and completion over time, and the school's completion plus transfer rate for first-time full-time students is 59 percent, nearly 20 percentage points above the national average.

## **Finalists**

- Broward College – Fort Lauderdale, FL
- CUNY Kingsborough Community College – Brooklyn, NY
- Mitchell Technical Institute – Mitchell, SD
- Pasadena City College – Pasadena, CA
- San Jacinto College – Pasadena, TX

Previous winners of the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence:

- Lake Area Technical Institute in South Dakota (2017)
- Santa Fe College in Florida (2015)
- Santa Barbara City College in California (2013)
- Walla Walla Community College in Washington (2013)
- Valencia College in Florida (2011)

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**The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program** aims to advance higher education practices, policies, and leadership that significantly improve student outcomes, especially for the growing population of low-income students and students of color on American campuses. The program is part of The Aspen Institute, which has a mission of fostering leadership based on enduring values and providing a nonpartisan venue for dealing with critical issues. For more information, visit <http://highered.aspeninstitute.org/> and [www.linkedin.com/showcase/aspenhighered](http://www.linkedin.com/showcase/aspenhighered) and follow [@AspenHigherEd](https://twitter.com/AspenHigherEd) on Twitter.

**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](http://www.aspeninstitute.org).