THE 2019
ASPEN PRIZE
FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXCELLENCE

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

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

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE CONGRATULATES THE FINALISTS FOR THE 2019 ASPEN PRIZE FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXCELLENCE

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WINNERS: **Indian River State College (FL)**
Miami Dade College (FL)

RISING STARS: **Odessa College (TX)**
Palo Alto College (TX)
Pierce College Fort Steilacoom (WA)

FINALISTS: Broward College (FL)
Kingsborough Community College (NY)
Mitchell Technical Institute (SD)
Pasadena City College (CA)
San Jacinto College (TX)

PRIOR WINNERS: Lake Area Technical Institute (SD)
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.

Reflections from the Field

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Josh Wyner
Founder and Executive Director of the College
Excellence Program at the Aspen Institute

It is an exciting time for community college reform. The 10 finalists for the 2019 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence—a $1 million award given every other year to the country's best community colleges— are working at the leading edge of a movement aimed at improving student outcomes in the key areas at the center of the Aspen Institute's definition of success: learning, degree and credential completion (at community college and after four-year transfer), and the labor market, achieved equitably for different student groups. Through these colleges' exceptional efforts, the Institute has learned a great deal about the thoughtfulness and persistence required for deep, transformational change on behalf of students.

We're seeing smart, institution-wide reforms in a range of internal systems, from clarifying program maps to focusing advising to improving faculty professional development. Colleges are strengthening relationships with K-12 systems, universities, employers, and community-based organizations. As we learn more about what's working in the field, we translate lessons about reforms into practical reports, assessment tools, curriculum, and convenings for college leaders, aimed at helping more community colleges achieve high and improving levels of student success.

While reform efforts involve common strategies, the design of those strategies varies substantially among finalist colleges. Leaders at each institution work to understand their communities and craft reforms that respond directly to *why* change is essential there. Too few young adults receive a college education. Too few unemployed (and underemployed) adults receive the formal learning needed to improve their station in life. Too many good jobs remain unfilled due to inadequate numbers of trained workers. Too much talent is left undeveloped—disproportionately among communities of color and those with the fewest resources.

At excellent community colleges, a deep-rooted sense of place and purpose drives reforms. Their leaders, faculty, and staff start with the where. They are unusually effective with the what (strong reform models) and the how (effective delivery). But perhaps what distinguishes them most is their consistent effort to keep everyone at their colleges focused on the why: They are dedicated day in and day out to finding the best ways to foster social mobility for their students and develop talent for their communities.

Guided pathways take hold

For too long, community college students have been left to craft their plans with inadequate guidance and support. Sure, advisors and faculty have been there to help, but even they can be confused by the options—which can include more than 1,000 courses at larger community colleges. More and more schools have come to realize that this "cafeteria approach" is a central reason students drop out, and are developing clear course pathways for students from matriculation to graduation.

Many colleges have adopted guided pathways in the past few years, but for some Prize finalists they're nothing new. Every program at Prize finalist Mitchell Technical Institute in South Dakota has long had clear maps of courses and defined learning objectives. The result: a three-year graduation rate of 67 percent, over twice the national average.

Most Aspen Prize finalists have paired clear program maps for all students with strong advising systems to support students along the way—an approach that has contributed to steady climbs in retention and graduation rates at Broward College, Indian River State College, and Miami Dade College in Florida as well as Palo Alto College and San Jacinto College in Texas. While some colleges are so large that they need to sequence their reforms of program maps and advising systems, Palo Alto College restructured program maps and a thoughtful case-management advising system for its 10,000 students at the same time. Leaders realized that it would be a huge challenge for advisors to help students select a program of study and stay on course if they each counseled 1,000 students, so they reallocated resources to reduce

At excellent community colleges, a deep-rooted sense of place and purpose drives reforms.

Aspen Prize finalist colleges understand that students will fall off even the most well-designed pathways if they don't have a range of supports to address their nonacademic needs.

caseloads to 350 students on average. The result: An 11 percentage point increase in the graduation rate over five years.

Aspen Prize finalist colleges understand that students will fall off even the most well-designed pathways if they don't have a range of supports to address their nonacademic needs. Kingsborough Community College in New York and Miami Dade, large colleges in major metropolitan areas, have developed robust support systems that include Single Stop centers, where students can find a range of assistance—from tax preparation to public benefits to transportation vouchers—all in one place. Pierce College in Washington works to connect students to resources, too; people throughout the college also work intentionally to lift systemic barriers to student success, including by removing fees and deadlines, revisiting attendance and residency policies, and simplifying enrollment and financial aid. Palo Alto surveys students to identify their biggest pain points, targets interventions accordingly, and assesses students' stress levels before and after to make sure the efforts are making a difference. These supports are likely one reason why these colleges have steadily increased retention rates while many other community colleges have struggled to keep students from dropping out.

Focusing on what comes next for students

Exceptional community colleges understand that if they are truly to improve opportunity, pathways must be designed to connect students to what comes next in their lives. So their workforce programs are specifically aligned to the needs of their local economies and good job opportunities for students. Along the Treasure Coast of Florida, Indian River runs some of the nation's leading laser technology and energy programs, as well as remarkable continuing education for law enforcement officers and first responders. Located in the heart of Texas's gas and oil country, Odessa College and San Jacinto run excellent programs in drilling and petrochemical processing. (Dow and BASF are collaborating with San Jacinto to codevelop a state-of-the art petrochemical processing plant that a leading industry magazine says will "change the face of how … key technicians of a plant are educated and trained.") Mitchell has an exceptional precision agriculture program that's aligned to regional needs, while Miami Dade's logistics program is delivering talent to a robust transportation industry.

Most community college students want to earn a bachelor's degree (or more) before entering the workforce, so excellent colleges make sure students are well prepared for transfer. It can be difficult to choose from among many four-year institutions, each with dozens of majors, and plot courses accordingly. Prize finalists have taken different approaches to help students transfer smoothly. Broward and Miami Dade have developed close relationships with two nearby universities, Florida

Atlantic and Florida International, that have a longstanding commitment to admitting and graduating transfer students. Strong program maps and guaranteed preferential admission, as well as strategic advising—including university advisors meeting with students at the community colleges—combine to foster strong rates of transfer and bachelor's degree attainment.

Palo Alto educates students in a very different context: Transfer students choose from, among other options, seven nearby colleges and universities, each independently governed. The college has had to build different program maps for different majors at different universities, 250 in all. One destination may count 60 community college credits toward a particular major, while another may accept only 42. This means that for some students, it makes sense to transfer before accumulating too many community college credits and an associate's degree. So even though it's common practice to counsel students to earn their associate's degree before transfer, Palo Alto advisors help students understand that there may be advantages to transferring without an associate's degree—then work to ensure that students retroactively receive the associate's through a reverse transfer arrangement. The result: Over 50 percent of Palo Alto's transfer students complete a bachelor's, well above the national average of 42 percent.

At Indian River the nearest four-year campus is 60 miles away. So the college has built 17 of its own bachelor's degree programs, more than any other Aspen Prize finalist, and aligned those programs to regional job opportunities in high-demand fields. As a result, Indian River has the highest level of bachelor's attainment among finalists.

Classroom reforms vary dramatically by context

Community colleges struggle to keep students enrolled due in part to their complicated lives: full-time jobs, families to care for, rising housing and transportation costs, a fraying social safety net. Imagine the retention challenge, then, when jobs paying $50,000 a year are available without a college degree. Such is the case at Odessa, where

Community colleges struggle to keep students enrolled due in part to their complicated lives.

Success by the Numbers

	STUDENTS OF COLOR	GRADUATION/ TRANSFER RATE FOR ALL STUDENTS	GRADUATION/ TRANSFER RATE FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR
Aspen Prize finalists	64%	45%	42%
National average	36%	39%	33%

Aspen Prize finalists achieve exceptional outcomes with diverse populations.

It's one thing to adopt reforms that have been proven to work elsewhere. It's another to do so at scale.

lucrative work in the oil fields—and plentiful service and retail jobs that cascade from the oil economy—have for decades drawn students away from community college, even in the middle of a semester. That wouldn't necessarily be a problem if those jobs existed in perpetuity, but the fluctuations of the industry make that a risky bet.

The college has responded by giving students every reason to stay. A remarkably effective process to train faculty to engage deeply with students has contributed to an unparalleled 96 percent course completion rate. San Jacinto has found an effective approach to professional development by training permanent department chairs to coach faculty on improving student connection and retention.

At Pierce College and Pasadena City College in California, many classroom improvements are centered on equity and inclusion. Pasadena administrators and faculty, concerned over disparities in student success rates by race and ethnicity, have developed a culture and professional development systems that support faculty in examining achievement gaps in their classrooms and redesigning course content and pedagogy through a cultural competency lens. At Pierce, the professional development and promotion structure rewards faculty for training in effective teaching practices and testing out innovations in their classrooms and measuring the results. At both colleges, teaching candidates are assessed for their commitment to equity.

Achieving high and improving levels of student success requires institutional leaders and practitioners to have a clear idea of what they are trying to accomplish in their particular context. It's one thing to adopt reforms that have been proven to work elsewhere. It's another to do so at scale, rather than merely through pilots that only help a small number of students. That sets apart excellent colleges like the 10 2019 Aspen Prize finalists, enabling them to develop reforms that work for all students. In the end, what allows those smart reforms to be scaled and last is an unwavering commitment to understanding the precise needs of *their* students and *their* communities, and using that knowledge to build reforms truly likely to help students succeed—both while in college and after they leave.

Congratulations to this year's Aspen Prize finalists, each of whom proves that community colleges deeply connected to their students and communities have the power to build a better future.

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:

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COMPLETION AND TRANSFER

High levels of 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

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

LABOR MARKET

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

EQUITY

High and equitable levels of access and success for historically underserved students—including students of color and those from low-income backgrounds—as well as institutional practices and policies

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Data cited in this report are drawn from federal and state data sets described on page 25.

Indian River State College

LOCATION: Fort Pierce, Florida

ENROLLMENT:
Student population: **24,300**
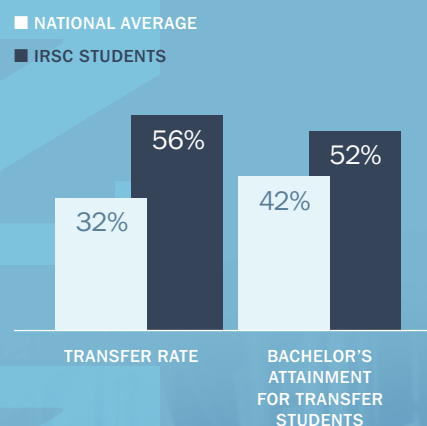Vocational/technical awards: **38%**

DEMOGRAPHICS:
Pell Grants awarded: **41%**
Students of color: **35%**

"I wasn't sure I would be able to go on, but I had an advisor who's been with me since the beginning."

—*Sabby, expected 2019 graduate and mother of four*

Indian River State College
—
Fort Pierce, Florida

It may seem counterintuitive that Indian River State College has among the strongest transfer outcomes in the nation, given that its semirural location on Florida's eastern coast is more than 60 miles from a four-year university. More than half of all IRSC students transfer into a bachelor's program, and more than half of those earn their degree.

■ NATIONAL AVERAGE
■ IRSC STUDENTS

56%

52%

32%

42%

TRANSFER RATE

BACHELOR'S
ATTAINMENT
FOR TRANSFER
STUDENTS

These 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 this isolated area—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.

One is Sabby, a mother of four who originally aimed to earn an associate's degree in nursing. As she moved through her health sciences "meta-major"—a bucket of majors grouped together around common core courses—Sabby's advisor and professors introduced her to other fields that better suited her emerging interests in hospice administration and community health. Her aspirations shifted to a bachelor's, and it was a smooth transition, since the majority of the prerequisite credits for the associate's in nursing count toward a four-year degree in health management.

Students' success in getting into programs of study early, making timely progress, and successfully transferring or moving into the workforce does not happen by accident. The college engineers student success into all of its processes and decisions. The walls and whiteboards of the IRSC cabinet meeting room are filled with color-coded charts and infographics displaying an ever-changing array of critical student outcomes data, from transfer rates to student survey results to momentum to degrees.

IRSC calls its highly structured, deeply pervasive focus on student success "The River Way": a customer service mindset and general way of life that reminds every college employee of their sense of responsibility for student success. "Our culture is precious to us," said Christina Hart, vice president of enrollment and student services. "We are very intentional in our service to students and to each other. We are family."

This service orientation drives not just human relationships, but the building of efficient structures for getting things done. Complex transformational reforms are developed and implemented remarkably quickly through the use of time-bound, task-specific working groups where staff from multiple departments are given clear charges to take action in focused areas— allowing the college to build and scale programs at rapid speed.

Take the school's efforts to build guided degree pathways with clear program maps, like those that helped Sabby make her way. Less than a year passed from the decision to launch pathways reforms to the establishment of clear course sequences and pathways maps for every program. Simultaneously, the college redesigned advising so that all advisors have an assigned caseload of students they're responsible for monitoring, supporting, and retaining. At many institutions, these complex changes take years.

Robust systems ensure that the curriculum and structure of guided pathways continue to align to what students need to be successful in transfer and the workforce. At the close of each semester, faculty and administrators gather to review learning outcomes and reevaluate the effectiveness of program plans

based on shifting workforce or transfer requirements. Department chairs summarize program enhancement efforts at semi-annual meetings and annual accountability reviews.

As a result of IRSC's transformational reforms and commitment to continuous improvement, the school's three-year graduation is now 39 percent—14 percentage points above the national average. A big part of that success is a robust system of student supports. For Sabby, these made all the difference between dropping out and staying enrolled. In her time at IRSC, Sabby endured the death of her father and her husband and the loss of her home in a fire.

"I wasn't sure I would be able to go on," she said. "But I have an advisor who's been with me since the beginning. She sat with me, cried with me, and she said … ' [I]f you stop out, what will you do?'" The advisor and Sabby's professors connected her to an array of resources: the college's food pantry, a "Career Closet" to help her replace the professional clothing she'd lost in the fire, even emergency aid to pay for a hotel. Now, Sabby is nearing graduation and will enroll at Florida Atlantic University to pursue a master's degree in health management—with a scholarship that IRSC advisors helped her secure.

The college's focus on student success extends well beyond graduation. The college deeply engages area employers in program design and delivery in areas where they strongly need talent, from health care to laser technology. Given the region's reliance on IRSC for developing the future workforce, Edwin Massey, the college's president, chairs the regional economic development council. These efforts make an impact: Even in the first year out of college, Indian River graduates earn well above the average for area workers.

AVERAGE EARNINGS:

$41,492 — IRSC ALUMNI FIVE YEARS AFTER GRADUATION

$38,714 — ALL REGIONAL WORKERS
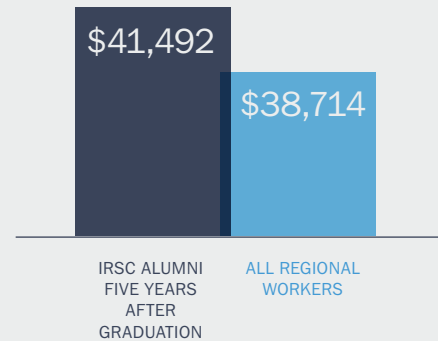
Miami Dade College

LOCATION: Miami, Florida

ENROLLMENT:
Student population: **96,000**
Vocational/technical awards: **24%**

DEMOGRAPHICS:
Pell Grants awarded: **53%**
Students of color: **84%**

"All my life I got lots of messages about what black men could be and what I should aspire to. But Miami Dade has fueled my passions, enabled me to be a kind of professional in a way I never thought I could."

—*Isaiah*, *a second-year student majoring in political science*

In taxis and restaurants, doctor's offices and the mayor's office, nearly everyone in Miami seems to have a relative who graduated from Miami Dade College—or they did so themselves. As the nation's largest community college, with more than 95,000 students enrolled annually, Miami Dade's presence is felt throughout the city.

AVERAGE EARNINGS:

$51,898

$51,260

MIAMI DADE ALUMNI FIVE YEARS AFTER GRADUATION

ALL REGIONAL WORKERS
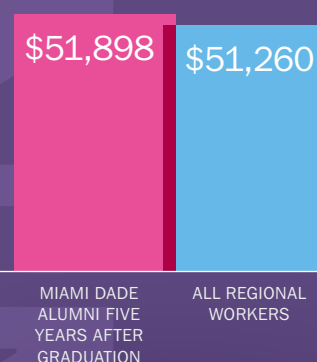
Miami Dade provides a clear path to economic and social mobility for its students. One year out of college, graduates earn more than $40,000, on average: 23 percent higher than what new hires in the region earn. Alumni include some of the most influential business and nonprofit leaders in the region and internationally—including former presidents of Panama and Haiti.

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. It's why President Eduardo Padrón—himself a Miami Dade graduate—has dubbed Miami Dade "democracy's college." But the commitment to students doesn't end with providing access—rather, the college is acutely focused on ensuring that students graduate or transfer and are successful in whatever comes next in their lives.

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. Undergirding these reforms have been strategic investments in key organizational capacities, including institutional research and an exemplary center for teaching and learning.

One example of Miami Dade's exceptional efforts to continually improve learning outcomes is in mathematics. In 2011-12, the college embarked on a comprehensive redesign of developmental education in order to dramatically improve the rate at which students enrolled in and passed a college-level math course. The urgency of the work accelerated when a 2013 Florida law made remedial coursework optional for most students. As many more students opted to enroll directly in college-level math regardless of their preparation, the college had to respond quickly. Intermediate Algebra, for example, was redesigned to incorporate more active learning, embedded tutors, proactive interventions when students struggle, and a common syllabus. As a result, pass rates have improved from 53 percent to 62 percent.

Each year, the math faculty devise an improvement plan in a specific focus area. The revision to the algebra pathway curriculum has resulted in the development of a common syllabus, assignments, and examinations. It also includes a heavy emphasis on early interventions to ensure students have the right support at the right time. As evidence points to higher success rates for redesigned sections, more full-time faculty are incorporating the redesign strategies in their classes.

These and other efforts reflect a culture where student success is everyone's job, and the impact on students' experience at the college is clear. "I was lost," said Isaiah, a second-year student majoring in political science. "I wasn't the best
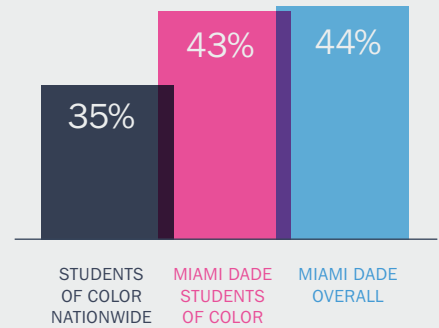
student in high school. All my life I got lots of messages about what black men could be and what I should aspire to. But Miami Dade has fueled my passions, enabled me to be a kind of professional in a way I never thought I could. The opportunities I have here have changed my imagining of what I thought I could do."

Isaiah's experience is not unique at Miami Dade. The college continues to improve its graduation rate, and there are virtually no disparities in outcomes for students of color. Recognizing that some students— particularly those attending part-time—still experience significant barriers to completion, college leaders are developing increasingly sophisticated approaches to better understand how to support students with diverse needs. For example, the college completely redesigned its process for administering financial aid: students now complete one ten-minute application (in addition to the FAFSA) that makes them eligible for more than 300 institutional scholarships.

Mathias left a four-year university when his financial aid was revoked because of his immigration status. "A nearly $5,000 bill landed at my feet, and the choice was pretty much made for me," he said. "I would not be able to pursue a college education ... something that I wanted and craved since I was a child." A friend convinced Mathias to take one class at Miami Dade. A half-hour after Mathias told his professor his personal story, he was introduced to advisors and financial aid officers, who connected him with a scholarship that enabled him to attend full-time.

Mathias, who will be graduating this spring and transferring in pursuit of a bachelor's degree in biology, now serves as a peer mentor. "I made it my mission to ensure that the trials I had to face would not need to be faced by another student again," he said. "... I owe everything to this college."

GRADUATION + TRANSFER RATE:

35% STUDENTS OF COLOR NATIONWIDE
43% MIAMI DADE STUDENTS OF COLOR
44% MIAMI DADE OVERALL

RISING STAR

Odessa College

LOCATION: Odessa, Texas

ENROLLMENT:
Student population: **7,500**
Vocational/technical awards: **56%**

DEMOGRAPHICS:
Pell Grants awarded: **23%**
Students of color: **63%**

Too often, "life happens" is the reason given for why so many community college students don't complete. But what would happen if all community colleges were places of belonging and connection, from the front door to the classroom, from advisors and faculty to the college president? That describes Odessa College, in western Texas. Through a set of impressive student, faculty, and staff engagement strategies— in and out of the classroom—Odessa proves how much and how fast student success rates can be improved. >

Odessa's location in the natural gas and oil capital of the United States offers unique and complex challenges. When oil is in high demand, jobs are plentiful and wages high, even for area residents with no college degree. But during busts, a college degree is the best defense against poverty.

This context led Odessa College to a decade-long redesign aimed at attracting, retaining, and graduating more students. The road to reform began with research revealing that students most often dropped out of classes due to a lack of connection with their instructors. So the college developed its Drop Rate Improvement Program, a framework for instruction aimed at fostering deep student engagement. All faculty are trained in strategies for supporting every student: learning their names on the first day of class, spotting when students require intervention, building one-on-one student interactions into every lesson plan, setting clear academic expectations.

"Students become better students with greater connectivity," said Donald Wood, vice president for institutional effectiveness. "Every time they go to a classroom, the instructor welcomes them. Every time they go from one course to another course, everyone knows their name."

This connection is reinforced through other new structures too. Over 80 percent of courses are taught in an eight-week format so students can achieve results more quickly. The first course for new students is free, and tuition drops as students near graduation. Faculty and staff are rewarded for tutoring and attending student activities.

The result of these scaled, creative interventions is clear: The course completion rate is 96 percent, and retention and graduation rates are on a steady climb.

COURSE COMPLETION RATE:

96%

RISING STAR
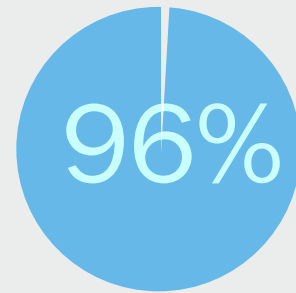
Palo Alto College

LOCATION: San Antonio, Texas

ENROLLMENT:

Student population: **10,600**

Vocational/technical awards: **36%**

DEMOGRAPHICS:

Pell Grants awarded: **33%**

Students of color: **73%**

Palo Alto College was founded in 1984 to provide access to underserved communities on the south side of San Antonio. Today, the college's 10,000 students benefit from an institution that does much more than provide access—it works to ensure that students move seamlessly from high school through to a bachelor's degree. >

Palo Alto College

In a community where half of adults lack a high school diploma, the college starts early, educating 3,000 high school students each year in early college high schools and dual-enrollment courses. A remarkable 80 percent of early college students earn an associate's degree by the time they complete high school.

"One of the things we believe in is that community college is a place of hope," said Robert Garza, Palo Alto's president. "It's a place where students can see their potential and pursue their dreams."

A central strength at Palo Alto is the establishment of clear academic pathways for all degrees, along with exceptional support to help students along those paths. Every student creates a success plan that reflects their academic goals and participates in mandatory advising—with well-trained advisors—at specific touchpoints throughout their trajectory. The college has aligned its degree pathways to majors at seven area four-year institutions. Using major-specific transfer advising guides, students are helped to understand options for when and where to transfer based on how many credits will apply to their desired major. These reforms have contributed to a 68 percent increase in the graduation and transfer rate over five years, with almost no completion gap for students of color, and half of students who transfer complete a bachelor's within six years, compared to 42 percent nationally.

By understanding and delivering what its students want and need—from high school through completion and into bachelor's attainment—Palo Alto is making good on its 35-year-old promise of not just college access but also success. Said President Garza, "I take pride in the very deliberate movement to listen to student voice and provide the mechanisms they need to be successful."

GRADUATION + TRANSFER RATE:

28% 2011

47% 2015

#PACproud

RISING STAR
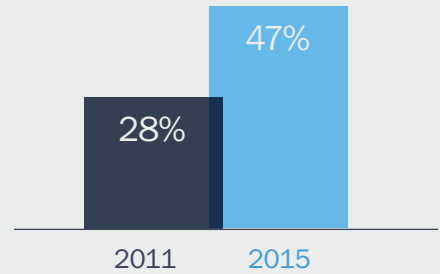
Pierce College Fort Steilacoom

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LOCATION: Lakewood, Washington

ENROLLMENT:
Student population: **10,430**
Vocational/technical awards: **27%**

DEMOGRAPHICS:
Pell Grants awarded: **34%**
Students of color: **23%**

Pierce College Fort Steilacoom, located in a military community outside the city of Tacoma, has committed itself to social justice and closing achievement gaps in numerous major ways: setting bold completion goals and tracking progress, implementing guided pathways, moving basic skills students into college programs. Pierce focuses, too, on the little things. At every turn, the college identifies and lifts the "microbarriers" that stand in students' way: Enrollment and financial aid processes have been simplified, transfer credits processed faster, admissions and testing fees eliminated, deadlines and attendance policies eased. >

Pierce staff are willing to take on difficult conversations. Professors see data on how students are doing not only in their classes but other sections, which has prompted collaboration to better align expectations and improve outcomes in courses that previously had wildly varied results. They have reworked syllabi to be more inclusive and culturally sensitive, and recruitment pipelines have been expanded to diversify the faculty.

Data analysis is de rigueur at Pierce, and action too. When data revealed that 40 percent of basic skills students said they wanted to move on to a credit-bearing college program but only 10 percent did, Pierce reformed the system. The last quarter of the GED course is now treated as the first quarter of college for every student, with tuition waived, and diploma-seekers are advised into career pathways, as any other students would be. The result has been significantly improved college matriculation.

Azure came to Pierce at age 29 with no college aspirations; she just thought that with a GED she could get a $12-an-hour office job to support her kids. As part of the college's bridge between basic skills and college, she was placed in English 101. With steady support and encouragement—"Pierce gave me every single tool"—she excelled.

And her aspirations changed. Two years later, Azure has an associate's degree in office management and a $20-an-hour job—no, a career—as an investigator. She also has an eye on the bachelor's in business that the college is developing. "The possibilities are endless," she said, "because of what Pierce has done for me."

GRADUATION + TRANSFER RATE:
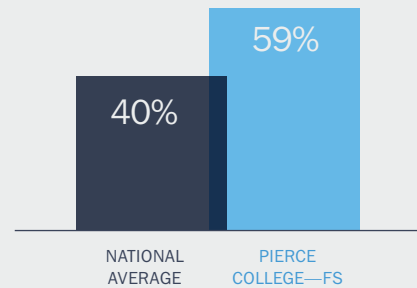
59%

40%

NATIONAL
AVERAGE

PIERCE
COLLEGE—FS

HOW DID WE SELECT THE WINNERS?

ROUND 1 **From over 1,000 community colleges to 150 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 150 eligible to apply for the Aspen Prize

ROUND 2 **From 150 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 102 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 interviews with about half of the applicant colleges' leadership teams.

ROUND 3 **From 10 finalists to winners 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 higher education leaders and experts, corporate leaders, and civil rights advocates reviewed the quantitative and qualitative information gathered in each of the three rounds to select those to be recognized with further distinction.

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 (1) meetings with institutional leaders, professors, department chairs, deans, staff, students, board members, community partners, and employers, and (2) documents submitted by each institution, including strategic plans, accreditation reports, and program review reports

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

Aspen collects extensive contextual data to help the Finalist Selection Committee and Prize Jury understand the unique attributes of the communities and regions served by each institution.

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 African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students
- Percentage of Pell Grant recipients

U.S. CENSUS

- Median family income of service area
- Urbanicity of institution location
- Racial/ethnic demographics of 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

We are deeply grateful to everyone who contributed to the analytic work and selection processes that led to the selection of the 2019 Aspen Prize Winner, Rising Stars, and Finalists.

Prize Jury

The Prize Jury thoughtfully deliberated and selected the winner and commended institutions from among the ten finalist community colleges.

JOHN BRIDGELAND, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Civic LLC

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

SARITA BROWN, President, Excelencia in Education

ÁNGEL CABRERA (co-chair), President, George Mason University

DAVID LEONHARDT, Op-Ed Columnist, The New York Times

ERICKA MILLER, Partner, Isaacson, Miller

JOELLE PHILLIPS, President, AT&T Tennessee

KATHY WARDEN (co-chair), Chief Executive Officer and President, Northrop Grumman

Data/Metrics Advisory Panel, Round 1

The Data/Metrics Advisory Panel, with technical support from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, provided critical guidance to improve upon the methodology for evaluating all U.S. community colleges and select colleges eligible to apply for the Aspen Prize.

KEITH BIRD, Chancellor Emeritus, Kentucky Community and Technical College System

NIKKI EDGECOMBE, Senior Research Scientist, Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University

LAURIE HEACOCK, Vice President of Data, Technology and Analytics, Achieving the Dream

RICHARD REEVES, Associate Vice President, Institutional Research and Effectiveness, University of Delaware

MAMIE VOIGHT, Vice President of Policy Research, Institute for Higher Education Policy

CHRISTINA WHITFIELD, Senior Vice President and Chief of Staff, State Higher Education Executive Officers Association

KATIE ZABACK, Senior Director of Policy, Partnerships, and Innovation, Colorado Department of Higher Education

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.

ELAINE BAKER, Consultant, Baker Communications Inc.

MICHAEL COLLINS, Vice President, Jobs for the Future

MICHELLE ASHA COOPER, President, Institute for Higher Education Policy

KIMBERLY GREEN, Executive Director, Advance CTE

ALFRED HERRERA, Assistant Vice Provost, Academic Partnerships, and Director, Center for Community College Partnerships, University of California, Los Angeles

MARC HERZOG, Chancellor Emeritus, Connecticut Community College System

MEI-YEN IRELAND, Executive Director of Holistic Student Supports, Achieving the Dream

ROB JOHNSTONE, President, National Center for Inquiry & Improvement

AMY LAITINEN, Director for Higher Education, New America

SHANNON LOONEY, Deputy Director, Office of Urban Initiatives, Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities

PAUL MARKHAM, Founding Partner, Sova Solutions

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

NICOLE SMITH, Research Professor and Chief Economist, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce

HEATHER WATHINGTON, President, Girard College

SHAWN WHALEN, Program Director, 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.

NIKKI EDGECOMBE, Senior Research Scientist, Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University

MARTHA ELLIS, Director, Higher Education Strategy, Policy, and Services, Charles A. Dana Center, The University of Texas at Austin

MARC HERZOG, Chancellor Emeritus, Connecticut Community College System

ROB JOHNSTONE, President, National Center for Inquiry & Improvement

HANA LAHR, Senior Research Associate, Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University

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

We are also grateful to these Aspen Presidential Fellows who served as site visitors:

LEIGH GOODSON, President and CEO, Tulsa Community College

MICHAEL GUTIERREZ, President, Sacramento City College

RUSSELL LOWERY-HART, President, Amarillo College

PAULA PANDO, President, J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College

STEVE ROBINSON, President, Owens Community College

AMIT SINGH, President, Edmonds Community College

LORI SUDDICK, President, College of Lake County

THOMAS WALKER JR., President, Wayne Community College

KRISTEN WESTOVER, President, Mountain Empire Community College

TONJUA WILLIAMS, President, St. Petersburg College

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We are also deeply appreciative of WestEd and Educational Results Partnership, who collaborated with us to develop a robust data dashboard to support Prize learning and assessment, and Marc Herzog, who contributed to the drafting of jury reports.

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

Aspen Prize finalist colleges are dedicated day in and day out to finding the best ways to foster social mobility for their students and develop talent for their communities.

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THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

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