



**The Aspen Institute and the Community College Research Center
Name the Ten Colleges Selected for “Unlocking Opportunity” Initiative**

National network of 10 exceptional community colleges commits to ensuring that every student can earn a bachelor’s degree or a high-quality workforce credential

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WASHINGTON D.C., February 7, 2023 – The Aspen Institute, in partnership with the Community College Research Center at Teacher College, Columbia University, today named the community colleges selected for Unlocking Opportunity: The Post-Graduation Success and Equity Network. Announced last fall, this network will be comprised of ten community colleges committed to improving students’ post-completion outcomes and proving that—by focusing on delivering credentials of value—colleges can strengthen the programs they offer and the advising they provide. The colleges are:

- Alamo Colleges District: San Antonio College, TX
- Laramie County Community College, WY
- Lorain County Community College, OH
- Monroe Community College, NY
- Odessa College, TX
- Sinclair College, OH
- Southwest Wisconsin Technical College, WI
- St. Petersburg College, FL
- Tulsa Community College, OK
- Valencia College, FL

San Jacinto College in Texas will also participate as a resource college. This national network will lead the field in shifting from the important but incomplete goal of graduating students with *any credential* to advancing access and completion with the end in mind: *credentials of value*. That means starting with the end in mind: making sure that every student is set up to earn a bachelor’s degree or a high-quality workforce credential—including students of color and low-income students, who, historically, have been least likely to enroll in and complete the programs that most often result in strong outcomes.

“For many years, community colleges have focused on improving graduation rates—and progress has been steady and impressive,” says Josh Wyner, founder and executive director of



the Aspen College Excellence Program. “But with enrollments dropping for a decade, it is time for community colleges to turn their attention to increasing the value of the credentials they deliver, especially for the large numbers of Black, Hispanic, and low-income students who rely so heavily on community colleges to provide a path to a better life. The colleges selected for this network have shown that they can make scaled and systemic change—and they are ready to work together on this critical goal.”

The network will run from 2023 through 2028. During the first three years, colleges will set concrete goals, plan reform strategies, and implement changes with the support of coaches and learning sessions. The final three years will include continued monitoring and research by CCRC and Aspen alongside the release of publicly accessible tools, case studies, and reports that will share lessons with the field. Throughout the process, colleges will focus on strengthening and rethinking existing programs and developing new program models that expand career and educational opportunity for all students.

“We’re excited to work with these colleges to help them evaluate and strengthen their programs and see which lead to great outcomes: either good jobs right away or via completion of a bachelor’s degree,” said Davis Jenkins, senior research scholar at the Community College Research Center. “This requires intensive work, and I cannot imagine a better group of institutions from which we can learn and share lessons with the field on how to deliver excellent and equitable programs.”

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The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program supports colleges and universities in their quest to achieve a higher standard of excellence, delivering credentials that unlock life-changing careers and strengthen our economy, society, and democracy. We know it takes visionary college leaders to achieve this higher standard and we make it our mission to equip them with the knowledge, skills, and research-backed tools to inspire change, shift practice, and advance the capacity of colleges to deliver excellent and equitable student outcomes. For more information, visit [our website](#) and follow us on [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#).

The Aspen Institute is a global nonprofit organization committed to realizing a free, just, and equitable society. Founded in 1949, the Institute drives change through dialogue, leadership, and action to help solve the most important challenges facing the United States and the world.



Headquartered in Washington, DC, the Institute has a campus in Aspen, Colorado, and an international network of partners. Learn more at [aspeninstitute.org](https://www.aspeninstitute.org).

The Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Teachers College, Columbia University studies community colleges because they provide critical access to postsecondary education and are uniquely positioned to promote equity and social mobility in the United States. Our mission is to conduct research that helps these institutions strengthen opportunities and improve outcomes for their students, particularly those from underserved populations. Learn more at ccrc.tc.columbia.edu.