



NEWS RELEASE

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Palo Alto College named finalist for national Aspen Prize - *Finalists represent top 1 percent of community colleges in nation* -

Alamo Colleges District-Palo Alto College announced it has been named one of 10 finalists for the 2019 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, the nation's signature recognition of high achievement and performance in America's community colleges. Palo Alto College is one of three colleges in Texas to make the top 10 list and is one of three first-time finalists.

Awarded every two years since 2011, the Aspen Prize recognizes institutions that achieve high and improving student outcomes, selected from over 1,000 community colleges nationwide. Focused solely on student access and success, the Aspen Prize recognizes community colleges with exceptional achievements in four areas: student learning; certificate and degree completion while in community college and after transferring to a four-year institution; employment and earnings rates after graduation; and access for and success of minority and low-income students.

"Being recognized by the Aspen Institute as one of the best community colleges in the nation is an incredible honor," said Dr. Mike Flores, president of Palo Alto College. "Moving forward in the Aspen process is a testament to the hard work, innovative ideas, and collaboration among our faculty, staff, and students, and we are honored to represent Texas."

Palo Alto College stands out as one of the nation's top one percent of community colleges for many reasons, including incredible improvement in three-year graduation/transfer rates from 28 percent in 2011 to 47 percent in 2015; a bachelor's completion rate after its students transfer to a four-year institution that is eight percentage points higher than the national average; strong pathways and advising systems that result in students taking the right courses, including math courses, which across the country impede many community college students from succeeding; and partnerships with eight K-12 school districts to provide up to 60 college credit hours free to high school students.

"Palo Alto College has made faster gains in graduation rates than virtually any community college Aspen has analyzed since the Prize began," said Joshua Wyner, Executive Director of the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program in Washington, D.C. "The College has developed strong advising systems, created clear program pathways, and reformed math education in ways that translate into incredible gains in student success. Many of these reforms and student success gains have taken hold across the impressive Alamo system, of which Palo Alto College is part, proving that concerted efforts can lead to dramatic gains in student success across multiple colleges."

The \$1 million prize will be awarded at an event in April 2019 in Washington, D.C. and shared with the winner, two or three finalists-with-distinction, and a "Rising Star" that has achieved exceptional levels of improvement. Between now and then, Aspen will work with a team of national experts to collect extensive, additional data and conduct multi-day site visits to the 10 finalists.

In October 2017, four colleges in the Alamo Colleges District – Northwest Vista College, Palo Alto College, San Antonio College, and St. Philip’s College – were named to the Aspen Institute’s list of 150 community colleges in the U.S. eligible to compete for the 2019 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence.

The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program aims to advance higher education practices, policies, and leadership that significantly improve student outcomes. Through the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, the Siemens-Aspen Community College STEM Award, and other initiatives, the College Excellence Program works to improve colleges’ understanding and capacity to teach and graduate students, especially the growing population of low-income and minority students on American campuses. For more information, visit highered.aspeninstitute.org.

The Aspen Institute is an educational and policy studies organization based in Washington, DC. Its mission is to foster leadership based on enduring values and to provide a nonpartisan venue for dealing with critical issues. The Institute is based in Washington, DC; Aspen, Colorado; and on the Wye River on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. It also has offices in New York City and an international network of partners. For more information, visit www.aspeninstitute.org.

Palo Alto College, part of the Alamo Colleges District, is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges and a recipient of the 2015 Texas Award for Performance Excellence and a finalist for the 2016 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. With over 10,000 students, Palo Alto College is accredited to offer associate degrees and short-term certificates. The College is located on the south side of San Antonio at 1400 W. Villaret Blvd. at I-410 and Texas Hwy 16 and online at alamo.edu/pac.

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