

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 2PM EASTERN,  
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2015**

**PRESS STATEMENT**

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**Statement from Joshua Wyner  
Executive Director, Aspen Institute for College Excellence**

**ASPEN INSTITUTE COLLEGE EXCELLENCE PROGRAM COMMENDS  
EUGENIO MARÍA DE HOSTOS COMMUNITY COLLEGE IN THE BRONX,  
NEW YORK FOR RANKING AMONG TOP TEN FINALISTS IN NATIONAL  
PRIZE COMPETITION**

Eugenio María de Hostos Community College, part of the City University of New York system, has been a community anchor and source of cultural pride in the South Bronx since 1968. Belying the challenges that come with being located in the country's poorest congressional district, the college has steadily improved retention rates for its students, nearly all of whom arrive at Hostos needing remedial classes before they can pursue college-level coursework. The college takes a holistic, hands-on approach to address the many social and economic challenges that can be barriers to success for low-income and diverse students. For instance, each new first-year student is assigned to a student success coach who provides intensive guidance and support from enrollment through graduation. As a result, not only are Hostos students gaining vital access to higher education, but they also are staying in college, transferring to four-year institutions and completing degrees.

Student outcomes and strategies:

- Steadily improving retention of some of the least academically prepared students, with a 61% first-to-second year retention rate (compared to 52% nationally)
- Comprehensive framework of student supports, including student success coaches; a highly effective Single Stop USA Resource Center, which connects students to untapped, essential public benefits and emergency assistance; immersive ESL classes for English learners; and wrap around services through regular case management for every student from entry through graduation

We thank Eugenio María de Hostos Community College for participating in this year's Aspen Prize process, and for helping define excellence for community colleges nationwide.

**For more information on Eugenio María de Hostos Community College, go to:**  
[www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/aspen-prize/media-resources](http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/aspen-prize/media-resources)

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## News Release

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### **2015 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence Awarded to Florida's Santa Fe College**

*Finalists-with-Distinction: Lake Area Technical Institute (SD) and  
West Kentucky Community & Technical College (KY)  
"Rising Star" Award: Kennedy-King College (IL)*

*\$1.1 Million Recognizes Excellence in Four Areas: Learning, Degree Completion, Minority  
and Low-Income Student Success, and Employment and Earnings*

**Washington, DC, March 18, 2015** – The Aspen Institute announced today that **Santa Fe College (SFC) in Gainesville, Florida is the winner of the [2015 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence](#)**, the nation's preeminent recognition of high achievement and performance in America's community colleges.

The \$1.1 million Aspen Prize, awarded every two years, recognizes institutions for outstanding outcomes in four areas: student learning; certificate and degree completion; employment and earnings; and high levels of access and success for minority and low-income students.

Selected from 1,123 public community colleges nationwide, Aspen Prize winner Santa Fe College will receive \$800,000 in prize funds. **Lake Area Technical Institute (LATI) in Watertown, South Dakota, and West Kentucky Community and Technical College (WKCTC) in Paducah, KY were named finalists-with-distinction.** And this year, for the first time, Aspen recognized a **top ten finalist with the "Rising Star" award for rapid improvement in student completion** with the honor going to **Kennedy-King College (KKC), part of the City Colleges of Chicago system.** All three will receive \$100,000 prizes. (*See full list of Top Ten Prize Finalists below and read more information about them at <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/college-excellence/2015aspenprize>.*)

"Aspen Prize winner Santa Fe and the finalists offer lessons in how community colleges large and small can provide an outstanding, affordable, and job-relevant education for every student," said Joshua Wyner, Executive Director of the Aspen Institute College Excellence

Program and author of *What Excellent Community Colleges Do*. “Santa Fe College particularly stands out for its exceptional work in keeping students on track to graduate with degrees that have incredible value after they graduate. Faculty and staff provide rigorous preparation for transfer to four-year universities like the nearby University of Florida (UF) and have proactively worked with local employers to meet their changing workforce needs. The results are clear: Santa Fe graduates have one of the highest transfer and bachelor’s attainment rates in the country as well strong employment and earnings outcomes.”

At today’s Prize announcement event at the National Press Club in Washington, DC, national and state leaders joined in celebrating the program and the accomplishments of the finalists. Speakers included Dr. Jill Biden, Second Lady of the United States; Governor Bill Haslam of Tennessee – the first state in the nation to offer free community college; and Aspen Prize Jury co-chairs Mitch Daniels, president of Purdue University and former Governor of Indiana, and former Representative George Miller (D-CA).

“So many Americans are relying on community colleges to provide the stepping stones to a college degree and a better future,” Dr. Biden said. “Our nation’s prosperity truly depends on our higher education system delivering more high-quality degrees to an increasingly diverse group of students. This is the time for community colleges to shine, and the institutions Aspen honors today are leading by example.”

Community colleges today enroll more than 40 percent of all US undergraduates – 7 million students – working toward degrees and certificates. These include rapidly growing numbers of lower-income and minority students. While nationwide, fewer than half of all community college students graduate, Aspen Prize finalist institutions demonstrate that community colleges can help students achieve higher levels of success while in college and after they graduate.

#### **Aspen Prize Winner - Santa Fe College (Gainesville, FL)**

Santa Fe College’s culture of excellence, collaboration, and dedication to student success is instilled throughout the entire institution. The College serves nearly 22,000 socioeconomically diverse students on main campuses and six satellite centers. Staff and faculty nimbly meet the challenge by providing rigorous education coupled with comprehensive supports – whether it’s developing apps to help students navigate the registration process, adding critical thinking coursework to every health field, bolstering supports for students who are no longer required to take remedial coursework because of a recent state law, or creating degree programs linked to new regional jobs ranging from high-tech to manufacturing. Santa Fe’s president, Dr. Jackson Sasser, has set out to address regional workforce development needs that nearby University of Florida cannot meet alone. For example, Sasser installed a bachelor’s degree programs in information technology in response to local companies’ needs for programmers and network specialists.

Student outcomes:

- Excellent overall graduation/transfer rates - 62% compared to 40% national average - supported by comprehensive systems to keep students on track

- Clear and highly successful transfer pathways with four-year universities, including the highly-selective University of Florida - 70% acceptance rate for Santa Fe graduates
- Strong success rates for underrepresented minority students, who make up 20% of the student body – graduation/transfer rate 49% compared with 34% national average

To read more about Santa Fe College go to: [insert url]

### **Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence**

For a full electronic press kit, including details that distinguished the Aspen Prize Winner and Finalists-with-Distinction, as well as information and lessons learned from the all of the Prize Finalists listed below, please visit: [www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/aspen-prize/media-resources](http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/aspen-prize/media-resources).

#### **Winner**

***Santa Fe College (Gainesville, FL)***

Media contact: Chuck Clemons, (352) 395-5200, [chuck.clemons@sfcollege.edu](mailto:chuck.clemons@sfcollege.edu)

#### **Finalists-with-Distinction**

***Lake Area Technical Institute (Watertown, SD)***

Media contact: LuAnn Strait, (605) 882-5284 ext. 241, [straitl@lakeareatech.edu](mailto:straitl@lakeareatech.edu)

Lake Area Technical Institute has been a finalist-with-distinction each of the three years the Aspen Prize has been awarded since 2011.

Student outcomes:

- 73% graduation/transfer rate among highest in the nation
- 98% of graduates are employed or continuing their education six months after graduation
- Graduates earn 49% more than other new hires in the region

***West Kentucky Community and Technical College (Paducah, KY)***

Media contact: Janett Blythe, (270) 534-3079, [janett.blythe@kctcs.edu](mailto:janett.blythe@kctcs.edu)

West Kentucky Community and Technical College is a three-time top ten finalist for Aspen Prize.

Student outcomes:

- 48% graduation/transfer rate
- No gap in graduation rates for students of color

#### **Winner: Rising Star Award**

***Kennedy-King College (Chicago, IL)***

Media contact: Katheryn Hayes, tel: 312-553-2719, [khayes32@ccc.edu](mailto:khayes32@ccc.edu)

Kennedy-King College's rapid and dramatic improvement in student completion earned them the Rising Star award.

Student outcomes:

- A tripling of graduation rates between 2010 and 2015
- 42% graduation/transfer rate for underrepresented minority students (compared to 34% nationally), who make up nearly the entire student body

### **Finalists**

#### ***Brazosport College (Lake Jackson, TX)***

Media contact: Kyle Smith, 979 230-3489, [kyle.smith@brazosport.edu](mailto:kyle.smith@brazosport.edu)

#### ***El Paso Community College (El Paso, TX)***

Contact: Keri Moe, tel: 915-831-6475, [kmoe@epcc.edu](mailto:kmoe@epcc.edu)

#### ***Eugenio María de Hostos Community College, CUNY (Bronx, NY)***

Media contact: Ana Carrión-Silva, tel: 718-518-4407, [amcarrion@hostos.cuny.edu](mailto:amcarrion@hostos.cuny.edu)

#### ***Indian River State College (Fort Pierce, FL)***

Media contact: Dr. Mary Locke, tel: 772-462-7225, [mlocke@irsc.edu](mailto:mlocke@irsc.edu)

#### ***Olympic College (Bremerton, WA)***

Media contact: Amanda Gebhardt-Fuentes, tel: 360-475-7721,  
[agebhardt Fuentes@olympic.edu](mailto:agebhardt Fuentes@olympic.edu)

#### ***Renton Technical College (Renton, WA)***

Media contact: Melissa Rohlfs, tel: 425-235-2356, [mrohlfs@rtc.edu](mailto:mrohlfs@rtc.edu)

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**The Aspen Prize** is funded by the Bank of America Charitable Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, and Lumina Foundation.

**The Aspen 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 New College Leadership Project, 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 [www.aspeninstitute.org/college-excellence](http://www.aspeninstitute.org/college-excellence).

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