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**SOUTHEAST KENTUCKY COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE AND  
WEST KENTUCKY COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE  
NAMED AMONG TEN FINALISTS FOR  
2013 ASPEN PRIZE FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXCELLENCE**

*Kentucky one of two states in US with multiple finalists;  
Top Community College and Finalists-With-Distinction to be Announced in March*

*\$1 Million Prize Rewards “Excellence”: Outstanding Outcomes in Learning, Completion,  
Minority and Low-Income Student Success, and Employment After College*

**Washington, D.C., September 5, 2012** – Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College in Cumberland (SKCTC) and West Kentucky Community and Technical College (WKCTC) in Paducah were named today two of ten finalists for the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, the nation’s signature recognition of high achievement and performance in America’s community colleges.

Kentucky is one of only two states in the country with more than one prize finalist. Both SKCTC and WKCTC now enter the last stage of the competition for the \$1 million prize fund that will be awarded in March in Washington, D.C. to the winner and up to four finalists-with-distinction. Last year, WKCTC was honored as one of the top five finalists.

Selected from an original pool of more than 1,000 community colleges, the Prize recognizes the most outstanding institutions for achievements in four areas: student learning outcomes, degree and college completion, labor market success in students securing jobs after college, and minority and low-income student success.

“Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College demonstrates that even community colleges facing tremendous barriers to student success can overcome them and excel,” said Josh Wyner, Executive Director of the Aspen Institute’s College Excellence Program. “The long-standing economic and social challenges of Appalachia are well-known. Through well-

constructed support services and strong developmental education programs, SKCTC is helping students earn degrees and certificates that lead to living wage jobs.”

SKCTC serves one of Kentucky’s most remote and isolated areas with high unemployment and deep poverty. The median family income around the college is \$35,000 – 61% of the national median family income. Many students arrive poorly prepared academically for college. SKCTC faculty and staff tailor their efforts to the unique needs of their student population, offering small-group tutoring, reading and writing classes, and online student assistance. SKCTC uses strong ties with the community and local industry to ensure that job training programs translate to jobs after college in the region’s industrial and growing health care fields.

Part of the same college system, West Kentucky Community and Technical College provides tremendous opportunities for students and the region alike, even as the area’s job market has been contracting. Recent WKCTC graduates are employed at very high rates. The college has played a vital role in the region’s economic development, supplying a robust local health care industry with the majority of nurses and other health care professionals, as well as creating new programs in response to the needs of local industries.

“WKCTC has demonstrated that it is a top community college for a second consecutive year” said Aspen’s Wyner. “Its leadership is driven to assess both community and student needs. By identifying barriers to student success and removing them, WKCTC is able to deliver custom-trained graduates who fit the bill for available jobs.”

### *Nearly Half Attend Community College*

Nearly half of all college students attend community college, with more than seven million students – youth and adult learners – enrolled across America, including rapidly growing lower-income and Hispanic student populations.

With four-year colleges and universities costing from \$10,000-\$60,000 per year per student, community colleges, growing at over four times the rate of four-year colleges, remain the most affordable option in higher education for millions of people in this country. In fact, average tuition and fees at public two-year colleges increased 1.8% per year from 1999-2000 to 2009-2010 after adjusting for inflation, compared to 4.9% at public four-year colleges and universities.

The ten community colleges named as finalists today were selected from an original national pool of over 1,000, and pared down to a list of 120 in April. An advisory committee expert in community college data and performance – co-chaired by William Trueheart, chief executive officer of Achieving the Dream, and Keith Bird, former college president and state community college system chancellor – devised a formula to select the 120 based on publicly available data. The formula considered three factors, each weighted equally:

- **Performance** [retention, graduation rates (including transfers), and degrees and certificates per 100 “full-time equivalent” students]
- **Improvement** [steady improvement in each performance metric over five years]

- **Equity** [evidence of completion outcomes for minority and low-income students]

The Aspen Top Ten Finalists selected today reflect the diversity of America – from the large ethnically diverse Broward College in Fort Lauderdale, with 60,000 students, to the more homogeneous, small town Lake Area Technical Institute in Watertown, South Dakota with an enrollment of 1,500, from the urban Kingsborough Community College, part of the City University of New York, in Brooklyn to the suburban Brazosport College in Lake Jackson, Texas. The full list of the finalists includes:

- Brazosport College, Lake Jackson, TX
- Broward College, Fort Lauderdale, FL
- College of the Ouachitas, Malvern, AR
- Kingsborough Community College - CUNY, Brooklyn, NY
- Lake Area Technical Institute, Watertown, SD\*
- Santa Barbara City College, Santa Barbara, CA\*
- Santa Fe College, Gainesville, FL
- Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College, Cumberland, KY
- Walla Walla Community College, Walla Walla, WA\*
- West Kentucky Community and Technical College, Paducah, KY\*

*Four of the colleges on the list earned this distinction for a second straight year (indicated by an asterisk)*

### **Engler, Riley Co-Chair Prize Jury**

The Aspen Institute will conduct site visits to each of the ten finalist institutions this fall and will also gather additional data on graduates' labor market outcomes from states. Following a rigorous review process of the data and practices on each finalist, a distinguished Prize Jury co-chaired by John Engler, president of The Business Roundtable and former Governor of Michigan, and Richard Riley, former South Carolina Governor and U.S. Secretary of Education, will select a grand prize winner and up to four finalists-with-distinction to be announced in March 2013.

The winner of the inaugural Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence awarded in December 2011 was Valencia College in Orlando, which shared the \$1 million Prize fund with four Finalists with Distinction. Valencia's president Sanford Shugart said, "All eyes are on us – on all community colleges – to raise the bar, to not only educate but also transform our nation's workforce. It's possible to improve student achievement. We know how to do this."

Aspen's Wyner emphasized that colleges like Valencia and this year's Prize finalists represent the accomplishments of the best community colleges - big and small – that too often go unnoticed. "We're showcasing excellence at a time when community college success is more important to the nation more than ever before. The leaders, faculty, and staff on these ten colleges' campuses are working incredibly hard to meet the increasing demands being placed on

two-year institutions. They deserve deep respect and admiration for what they are doing to enable student success,” he said.

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**The Aspen Prize** is funded by America Achieves, Bank of America Charitable Foundation, Joyce Foundation, JPMorgan Chase Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies, and Lumina Foundation for Education

**The Aspen College Excellence Program** aims to identify and replicate campus-wide practices that significantly improve college 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/policy-work/aspen-prize](http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/aspen-prize).

**The Aspen Institute** mission is twofold: to foster values-based leadership, encouraging individuals to reflect on the ideals and ideas that define a good society, and to provide a neutral and balanced venue for discussing and acting on critical issues. The Aspen Institute does this primarily in four ways: seminars, young-leader fellowships around the globe, policy programs, and public conferences and events. The Institute is based in Washington, DC; Aspen, Colorado; and on the Wye River on Maryland's Eastern Shore. It also has an international network of partners. For more information, visit [www.aspeninstitute.org](http://www.aspeninstitute.org).