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## **Two South Dakota technical institutes named among top 150 in the country**

PIERRE, S.D. – The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program today again named Lake Area Technical Institute and Mitchell Technical Institute among the nation's top 150 community colleges eligible to compete for the 2017 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence and \$1 million in prize funds, as well as Siemens Technical Scholars Program student scholarships.

The prize, awarded every two years, is the nation's signature recognition of high achievement and performance among America's community colleges and recognizes institutions for exceptional student outcomes in four areas: student learning, certificate and degree completion, employment and earnings, and access and success for minority and low-income students. Both schools have made the list since the inception of the award and LATI has been a finalist with distinction each time.

LATI President Mike Cartney and MTI President Mark Wilson issued a joint statement: "Everyone in our organizations is focused on one mission: building South Dakota's technically skilled workforce. Our students can be confident their education prepares them for in-demand technical careers; business and industry can be assured our graduates are ready to tackle the challenges of today's dynamic and technology-driven environment. As a system of four technical schools, we are committed to continually improving. National recognition like the Aspen College Excellence Program affirms our efforts are making a difference."

Nearly half of America's college students attend community college, with more than 7 million students – youth and adult learners – working towards certificates and degrees in these institutions across the country. More than 6,300 students are currently enrolled in South Dakota's technical institute system.

Tiffany Sanderson, director of career and technical education for the South Dakota Department of Education says, "The four technical institutes in Watertown, Mitchell, Sioux Falls and Rapid City do an outstanding job of preparing students as skilled scholars, ready to contribute to business' goals and the communities where they live. For half of our schools to be named to the nation's top 15 percent of two-year colleges, speaks heavily to their quality."

Lake Area Technical Institute and Mitchell Technical Institute, along with 148 other community colleges announced today were selected from a national pool of over 1,000 public two-year colleges using publicly available data on student outcomes in three areas:

- **Performance** (retention, graduation rates including transfers and degrees and certificates per 100 full-time equivalent students)
- **Improvement** (awarded for steady improvement in each performance metric over time)
- **Equity** (evidence of strong completion outcomes for minority and low-income students)

LATI and MTI have been invited to submit an application to the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence containing detailed data on degree and certificate completion (including progress and transfer rates), labor market outcomes (employment and earnings) and student learning outcomes.

Ten finalists will be named in fall 2016. The Aspen Institute will then conduct site visits to each of the finalists and collect additional quantitative data. A distinguished prize jury will select a grand prize winner and finalists with distinction in early 2017.

A full list of the selected colleges and details on the selection process are available at [www.aspenprize.org](http://www.aspenprize.org).

### **Scholarship Opportunities**

For the first time, the 150 prize-eligible institutions are also invited to nominate exceptional students enrolled in their best middle-skill STEM programs for scholarships. Up to 50 Siemens Technical Scholars will be selected from programs that provide outstanding preparation for high-demand jobs in manufacturing, energy, health care and information technology. A partnership between the Siemens Foundation and the Aspen Institute, the Siemens Technical Scholars Program intends to help our nation's community colleges and their business partners bridge the gap between projected shortages of skilled workers and the millions of high-demand jobs in these STEM industries. Scholarship winners and the programs that deliver rigorous training enabling their success will be announced in fall 2016. Lake Area Technical Institute was recognized this past year with three 2015 Siemens Technical Scholars. For more information and to view video profiles of 2015 Siemens Technical Scholars, go to: <http://as.pn/stscholars>.

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**The Aspen Prize** is funded by the Joyce Foundation, the Siemens Foundation and the Kresge 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).