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# Miami Dade, Broward Colleges In Running For Prestigious National Prize — And A Big Check

By [JESSICA BAKEMAN \(/PEOPLE/JESSICA-BAKEMAN\)](/PEOPLE/JESSICA-BAKEMAN) • 21 HOURS AGO✈ [Tweet \(http://twitter.com/intent/tweet?\)](http://twitter.com/intent/tweet?)[url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.tinyurl.com%2Fy98wbqm7&text=Miami%20Dade%2C%20Broward%20Colleges%20In%20Running%20For](http://www.tinyurl.com/2Fy98wbqm7&text=Miami%20Dade%2C%20Broward%20Colleges%20In%20Running%20For)f [Share \(http://facebook.com/sharer.php?\)](http://facebook.com/sharer.php?)[u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.tinyurl.com%2Fy98wbqm7&t=Miami%20Dade%2C%20Broward%20Colleges%20In%20Running%20For%20I](http://www.tinyurl.com/2Fy98wbqm7&t=Miami%20Dade%2C%20Broward%20Colleges%20In%20Running%20For%20I)g+ [Google+ \(https://plus.google.com/share?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.tinyurl.com/2Fy98wbqm7\)](https://plus.google.com/share?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.tinyurl.com/2Fy98wbqm7)✉ [Email \(mailto:?\)](mailto:)[subject=Miami%20Dade%2C%20Broward%20Colleges%20In%20Running%20For%20Prestigious%20National%20Prize%20%E2%80%](mailto:)[http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wlrn/files/styles/x\\_large/public/201807/herald\\_mdc.jpeg](http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wlrn/files/styles/x_large/public/201807/herald_mdc.jpeg)

Students work in The Learning Center at Miami Dade College's Hialeah Campus in 2015. The school is a candidate for the Aspen Prize, which comes with up to \$600,000.

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<http://wlrn.org/post/miami-dade-broward-colleges-running-prestigious-national-prize-and-big-check>

Two South Florida community colleges are in the running for a prestigious national award — and the biggest share of a \$1 million prize.

Miami Dade College and Broward College — plus one other Florida school, Indian River State College in Fort Pierce — are finalists for the Aspen Prize, which recognizes excellence in community colleges. It's the first time three colleges from the same state have been nominated.



Listen

*Listen here to the conversation between WLRN's Jessica Bakeman and Josh Wyner of the Aspen Institute.*

The Aspen Institute, a think tank that awards the prize, is in the process of visiting the finalist colleges to determine which will win the award in March 2019.

WLRN's Jessica Bakeman recently spoke with Josh Wyner, vice president of the Aspen Institute. He founded and leads the College Excellence Program.

Here's an excerpt of their conversation:

**WLRN: Can you start by telling us: What is the Aspen Prize?**

WYNER: The Aspen Prize was created actually at the White House in 2010. And the idea is to celebrate the best community colleges in the country. It's a million-dollar prize every other year.

For 15 to 16 months, we look deeply at which colleges of all 1,000 community colleges in the country are achieving the best outcomes for students — in completing and learning, and also how well they do after they graduate.

**So two of our South Florida colleges are nominated this year. Let's start with Miami Dade College. What impressed you about the school?**

When we look at the labor market outcomes for Miami Dade graduates, they are earning over \$60,000 a year five years after graduating. And that compares in the region to between \$45,000 and \$50,000 a year for the average worker.



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*Josh Wyner is vice president of the Aspen Institute and founder of the College Excellence Program.*

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**OK, so what about Broward College?**

Nearly half of underrepresented minority students are graduating at Broward. Nationally, the number is about 34 percent.

**Do you know what it is that Broward is doing to help those students graduate...[while] their peers in other parts of the country don't have the same high graduation rates?**

It's one of the best examples nationally of a college that has kept loans down and loan default rates down. So they're helping students make sure that they're savvy with their money and that they have the money they need to graduate, but they are not borrowing more than they need so that when they graduate, they're not burdened by debt.

I will say that one of the cultural elements of great colleges, which you see both at Broward and Miami Dade, is that they don't blame the students when students fail to succeed. They look and ask themselves — they look in the mirror and say, 'What can we change to enable the college to be student-ready?' Rather than assuming that it's just about students being college-ready.

**So the Aspen Prize comes with \$1 million. If Miami Dade wins it, or if Broward wins it, what's the money for? What will they do with it?**

So, to be clear, there's a million-dollar pot and the winner gets about \$600,000. And then we have a few other categories that are \$100,000 each. It's really up to the college what to do with it.

Two other Florida colleges have already won the Aspen Prize. Valencia [College in Orlando], which is the first winner of the Aspen Prize ... took the \$600,000. And they raised matching money to create a \$3 million pot of money, which they then used to help students complete their bachelor's degrees at the University of Central Florida.

**So, as you mentioned, Florida colleges have done pretty well so far with the Aspen Prize competition. So I'm wondering: What is it about schools here that makes them national standouts?**

The guaranteed-transfer legislation — which guarantees a spot at a four-year school for any graduate of a two-year school — is an investment made that enables the system to do really well.

**Is there anything you've identified about Miami Dade or Broward that you think they could be doing better?**

Sure. One of the reasons students don't graduate is because they come in and they take courses without knowing precisely which courses will enable them both to graduate and to transfer to FAU [Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton] or FIU [Florida International University in Miami]. A "guided pathway" is sort of a roadmap for a student of what to take every semester. Miami Dade built those guided pathways for about 60 percent of its students. And I think for some of its smaller programs — that's work that still needs to be done.

Broward is struggling right now with the question of how they're going to find the money to bring their advisor-to-student ratio to where it needs to be.

**In recent years, the Legislature has focused really on universities and K-12 — and not so much community colleges. I wonder if that's something that you guys look at in terms of the investment that's coming from the state.**

I have been aware of some of the legislative moves to shift funding away from community colleges. And I've been frankly puzzled by that. This is one of the best community college systems in the country.

I was just with a college president at a meeting, and he said, they are not "to colleges." They're "through colleges." They are colleges that help students go from K-12 or from unemployment or underemployment to a four-year school or to a good job. And so the notion of removing or disinvesting a key link in that chain just doesn't make a lot of sense.

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