The Aspen Institute announced that West Kentucky Community & Technical College (WKCTC) in Paducah, Kentucky was a Finalist-with-Distinction for the 2015 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence March 18. Selected from 1,123 community colleges nationwide, this is the second time WKCTC has been awarded this honor along with $100,000 in Prize funds to support its programs.

The Aspen Prize, the nation’s preeminent recognition of high achievement and performance in America’s community colleges, is awarded every two years and 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.

“West Kentucky Community & Technical College has been a steady improver and built a community-wide college-going culture in an area where few people sought a degree beyond a high school diploma,” said Joshua Wyner, Executive Director of the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program and author of What Excellent Community Colleges Do. “Faculty and staff are constantly working hard to improve their teaching and get students on the path to a better future.”

WKCTC has ranked as a Top Ten Finalist every year the Aspen Prize has been awarded since its launch in 2011. Located in a region with low educational achievement and significant industrial decline, WKCTC has worked to draw first-generation students into college and make sure they succeed. Faculty and staff consistently track student learning and completion outcomes, and use data to improve teaching and guidance practices in response. These efforts have resulted in an increase in student retention and degree completion. And, as thousands of jobs have left the region, the college has been a primary player in efforts to expand economic growth, from creating a high-tech industrial training facility for area companies to adding programs in anticipated growth areas, including marine technology and logistics and operations management.

“Being a finalist for the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program demonstrates West Kentucky Community and Technical College has achieved a level of success that few other colleges nationwide have attained,” KCTCS President Jay Box said. “To be on this prestigious list three times is a great tribute to the students, faculty, staff and leadership. I’m proud of the dedication and commitment of the WKCTC team.”

At the 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).