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CONTACT: Katie Emerson

(909) 324-0345

katharine.emerson@vmapr.com

Three Caring Campus Community Colleges Named Aspen Prize Finalists, Recognized for Student Success

LONG BEACH, CA – Three Caring Campus community colleges have been named 2025 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence finalists by the Aspen Institute, shining a light on their exceptional commitment to fostering a culture of care that drives student success.

Northwest Vista College in Texas, Wallace State Community College in Alabama, and Moorpark College in California are three out of the 10 institutions chosen as finalists from more than 1,000 community colleges nationwide. Awarded every two years, the Aspen Prize recognizes colleges with high and improving levels of student success, as well as equitable outcomes for students of color and those from lower-income backgrounds.

“Student success is at the heart of everything we do as a college,” Wallace State president Dr. Vicki Karolewics said. “Our intentional focus on providing holistic student services, informed and inspired by our work with Caring Campus, continues to help us move the needle on student success.”

After completing Caring Campus in 2020, Wallace State began implementing an annual Welcome Week, in which staff greet new and returning students, provide a Help Hub with directions to classes, provide technical assistance, introduce students to “hot-spots” on campus, offer giveaways and treats, and more.

Additionally, with the receipt of Title III funds, Wallace State has expanded its holistic support by providing referrals to campus and community resources, offering tele-mental health services, collaborating with the Future Foundation to streamline emergency aid, and providing employees with professional development opportunities designed to educate and empower them so they can better support students.

“Students are often immediately expressive of their gratitude when they feel cared for,” said Kristen Holmes, Wallace State Vice President for Students & Chief Marketing Officer. “Through case management and follow-up, we gain insight into how our efforts impact them. Students have said they appreciate the time we spend with them, the resources we connect them to, and the support we provide through our many services.”

In the 2022-23 school year, Wallace State College boasted a 68% full-time student retention rate and a 48% graduation rate, well above the state averages of 55% and 43% respectively.

Northwest Vista staff recently completed Caring Campus training and kicked off the school year with Wildcat Welcome Days, focusing on personal connections with students to create a welcoming campus environment.

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“Being an Aspen Prize finalist is incredible validation and motivation for our faculty and staff as it’s a tangible way they can see their work really does matter and impacts students,” Northwest Vista College president Dr. Amy Bosley said. “Caring Campus has given us a common and consistent approach across our campus in ensuring students feel safe and welcome here.”

Moorpark College has implemented Caring Campus strategies, including distributing branded t-shirts to classified professionals for key events, hosting welcome tables staffed by these professionals to assist students, and creating a resource page with a QR code for easy access to essential student services.

“Being named an Aspen Prize finalist is a reflection of our unwavering dedication to student success,” Moorpark College president Dr. Julius Sokenu said. “Caring Campus has played a crucial role in creating an inclusive and supportive environment where every student can thrive.”

The Aspen Institute evaluates retention, completion, and transfer data from community colleges across the nation, inviting only 150 colleges to apply for the prestigious Aspen Prize. Through reviews and interviews spanning multiple rounds, 10 finalists were selected. These finalists will receive an on-site campus visit in the coming months, with the Aspen Prize winner announced in April 2025.

The Institute for Evidence-Based Change has brought Caring Campus to 138 institutions nationwide, reflecting a significant presence of Caring Campus colleges among the Aspen Prize finalists, and stressing the importance of prioritizing a caring and student-centered culture on campus. Imperial Valley College, another Caring Campus, was one of two Aspen Prize winners when the award was last given in 2023.

“The recognition of these colleges by the Aspen Institute underscores the importance of creating environments where every student feels valued and supported,” Caring Campus founder Dr. Brad Phillips said. “This is the core of what Caring Campus is all about.”

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

IEBC_ASPEN1: Northwest Vista Community College is one of three Caring Campus colleges to be named a 2025 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence finalist by the Aspen Institute for its commitment to student success.

IEBC_ASPEN2: Wallace State Community College is one of three Caring Campus colleges to be an Aspen Prize finalist. Wallace State has expanded its holistic support for students by providing referrals to campus and community resources, offering tele-mental health services, collaborating with the Future Foundation to streamline emergency aid, and more.

IEBC_ASPEN3: Moorpark Community College is one of three Caring Campus colleges to be an Aspen Prize finalist, with the award winner announced in April 2025.

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