



NEWS RELEASE

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Program for students with intellectual disabilities at Palo Alto College named a finalist for state education award

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) named Alamo Colleges District-Palo Alto College's Project Access – a program for students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities – as one of five state-wide finalists for the 2018 Texas Higher Education Star Award, which recognizes exceptional contributions toward meeting the THECB's *60x30TX* education plan goals. Of 36 nominations and 26 applications for the 2018 Star Award, Palo Alto College is only institution of higher education in San Antonio to be a finalist this year.

"Palo Alto College answered the call to offer higher education to an underserved population of students with intellectual disabilities by starting Project Access," said Cindy Morgan, coordinator for the College's Disability Support Services. "These students are thriving in their new role as college students and seeing the change in them as they progress is the most rewarding."

Launched in Fall 2016 with an initial cohort of seven students, Project Access offers an opportunity for students with intellectual disabilities to take college-level courses to earn their 16-credit-hour General Office Level 1 Certificate over three semesters and acquire necessary skills for gainful employment. The program now serves 40 students pursuing certificates that can ultimately lead toward a degree – the Associate of Applied Science in Administrative Assistant.

The annual Texas Higher Education Star award was originally established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in 2001 to recognize exceptional contributions toward achieving one or more of the goals of the former long-range Texas higher education plan. The state's newest higher education plan, *60x30TX*, builds on the success of *Closing the Gaps* and is designed to establish a globally competitive workforce in Texas by 2030. The 18th Annual Star Awards Ceremony will take place on Nov. 30 in Austin in conjunction with the 2018 Texas Higher Education Leadership Conference.

Palo Alto College, part of the Alamo Colleges District, is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges and a recipient of the 2015 Texas Award for Performance Excellence, a finalist for the 2016 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, and a top 10 finalist for the 2019 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence. With over 10,000 students, Palo Alto College is accredited to offer associate degrees and short-term certificates. The College is located on the south side of San Antonio at 1400 W. Villaret Blvd. at I-410 and Texas Hwy 16 and online at alamo.edu/pac.

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