

# Hub wins top prize for urban education

By Maria Sacchetti

GLOBE STAFF

Boston finally won the top urban school prize in the nation yesterday after four years as a runner-up.

As a winner of the Broad Prize for Urban Education, Boston public schools netted \$500,000 in scholarships for low-income high school seniors who improved their grades. Students heading to four-year colleges could get \$10,000, while those heading to two-year schools could win \$2,500.

The mood at the ceremony in New York's Museum of Modern Art was giddy, according to those in attendance. That's a change from last year, when the school system endured a crushing loss to Norfolk, Va., schools only months before Superintendent Thomas W. Payzant retired.

Yesterday, Boston School Committee chairwoman Elizabeth Reilinger said she cracked Susan Lucci jokes, referring to the soap opera star who won an Emmy after 18 losses.

Mayor Thomas M. Menino, who attended the ceremony, quipped "thanks a million" for the scholarship money Boston racked up as a runner-up and now as a winner. As a runner-up, Boston



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**Former superintendent Thomas Payzant and Mayor Thomas M. Menino celebrated the city's award yesterday in New York.**

had accumulated \$500,000 in scholarship money.

A crowd of 400 gave Boston a standing ovation when philanthropist Eli Broad opened the envelope with the winner's name and pulled the cloth off an oversized check.

Payzant, who retired in June after almost 11 years as superintendent, was flown in for the ceremony, along with Reilinger and the interim superintendent, Michael Contompasis.

"Perseverance paid off," Payzant said. "It's a huge deal."

The Broad Prize for Urban Education, created in 2002, is the largest award given to urban school systems that raise achievement. School systems do not apply for the award. Each year, the Los Angeles-based Broad Foundation asks independent specialists to examine the nation's 100 largest school systems with significant

numbers of low-income and minority students. School systems are judged on state test scores, performance on national tests, improvement over time, and whether they have narrowed gaps among racial and ethnic groups, as well as other measures.

Judges praised Boston for steadily raising scores on state tests, and for outperforming other Massachusetts districts with similar demographics. On national tests, Boston raised reading and math scores in the fourth and eighth grades faster than other large US cities. Broad said Boston came close last year, and because it kept improving, won this year.

Payzant credited Boston's improvement to a variety of initiatives, including a "laser-like focus" on teacher training.

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