

## Boston District Wins Broad Foundation's Award

Urban education prize honors score gains

BY CATHERINE GEWERTZ

After four years as a finalist, the Boston school district won the **Broad Prize** for Urban Education last week in recognition of its success improving achievement, especially among racial- and ethnic-minority groups.

Boston won the prize only three months after the retirement of Thomas W. Payzant, who orchestrated key improvements during more than a decade as superintendent. "The fifth time's the charm," Mr. Payzant said in a telephone interview from New York City, shortly after the award was announced there on Sept. 19.

As the winner, the Boston district gets \$500,000 to be used to provide college scholarships for students. The other finalists this year—the school districts in Bridgeport, Conn., Jersey City, N.J.; Miami-Dade County, Fla.; and New York City—will each receive \$125,000 in scholarship money.

In awarding the prize, officials of the Los Angeles-based Broad Foundation noted that since 2002, the 58,000-student Boston public schools have outperformed demographically similar districts in Massachusetts in reading and mathematics in elementary, middle, and high school.

Students in Boston in 4th and 8th grade improved faster in those subjects than students nationwide, and those attending schools in other large cities, on the National Assessment of Educational Progress between the 2002-03 and 2004-05 school years.

Boston's African-American students have improved in reading and math more than those in other similar districts in the state, and the district is closing the math gap between Latino and white students at the middle and high school levels faster than the state

average, the foundation said. The district has also seen large increases in the numbers of black and Latino students taking Advanced Placement exams in English and math.

### Stability Counts

Eli Broad, the founder of the philanthropy and an active proponent of a strong mayoral role in school governance, praised the "stable leadership" of Mr. Payzant and Mayor Thomas M. Menino, who appointed Mr. Payzant and worked closely with him, as pivotal to the district's performance, along with its use of data to guide teaching.

"While it is discouraging that there is not more success in this country's public school systems, other large urban districts can learn from Boston's success," Mr. Broad said in a statement.

Mr. Payzant attributed the district's improvement to maintaining a clear focus on beefing up instruction, linking all initiatives and strategies to serve that end, and changing the culture of the district so that teachers work collaboratively to improve their practice.

"It's steady: teaching and learning," he said. "That is what it's all about, rather than just creating lists of new initiatives each year."

Despite the district's success, Mr. Payzant said, much work remains to be done to raise the high school graduation rate, close achievement gaps, and stem teacher turnover.

Michael G. Contompasis, who was the district's chief operating officer for eight years before becoming its interim superintendent in June, said Boston made the progress it did because Mayor Menino and Mr. Payzant were able to keep a consistent focus on schools for more than a decade.

"It's a commitment to standards and systemic reform which we've never veered away from," he said.

The Boston school board's search for a permanent superintendent to replace Mr. Payzant went off schedule this past summer, when several candidates withdrew from the running. The district now hopes

to have a permanent superintendent in place in January. (See *Education Week*, July 26, 2006.)



Diane Bondareff/Broad Foundation/AP

**Thomas W. Payzant, who retired in June as superintendent of the Boston schools, shakes hands with Mayor Thomas M. Menino at the New York City awards ceremony on Sept. 19.**