

'06 Broad Prize Recognizes Gains In Boston Schools

By DAVID M. HERSZENHORN

The Boston Public Schools, which over the last decade became a model for improving big-city school systems and particularly notable for steady teamwork between the city's mayor and its school superintendent, has won this year's Broad Prize, a \$500,000 award to the urban school district making the greatest strides in student achievement.

Boston had been a runner-up in each of the four years since the prize was created in 2002, but this year bested the other finalists, New York City, Jersey City, Miami-Dade County and Bridgeport, Conn., in capturing the top honors.

"Indeed, the fifth time is the charm, and for that we're grateful," said Thomas W. Payzant, who was the superintendent of the Boston schools from 1995 until June, when he retired.

The prize was announced yesterday in Manhattan during a ceremony at the Museum of Modern Art by Eli Broad, the founder of the **Broad Foundation**, which is dedicated to improving urban school districts across the country.

Mr. Payzant and other Boston officials, including Mayor Thomas M. Menino, reacted with a mixture of glee and relief. Mr. Menino joked that he should have stayed home to oversee primary elections.

"Today is Election Day in Boston," he said. "What am I doing here? All my candidates are going down the tubes." But he went on to declare it a great day for Boston, adding, "It takes a community to educate our children."

New York City was a finalist for a second year and officials had not been particularly optimistic about its chances to win, knowing of Boston's longtime runner-up status. New York and the other three finalists will each



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The foundation of Eli Broad, who started SunAmerica, focuses on urban schools.

receive \$125,000. As with the top prize, the money is to be given as scholarships to graduating high school seniors.

Mr. Broad, a billionaire who founded SunAmerica Inc., an insurance and financial services firm, and KB Home, the house-building company, created the prize to draw attention to urban education issues. The \$1 million in total prize money is dwarfed by the millions of dollars in grants that his foundation awards to school districts each year.

In determining the annual winner, a selection jury that this year included two former federal education secretaries scrutinizes reams of test score data, mostly in an effort to judge how well large urban districts performed relative to districts serving similar students in their state, meaning that Boston was largely compared with other Massachusetts districts.

Foundation officials said Boston's gains had clearly outpaced those of other districts. Dan Katzir, the foundation's managing director, said he was struck by Boston's consistency in ranking among the top performers over the last five years. "They have been a very strong-performing district over a long period of time," he said.