

Philanthropy calls attention to progress in NYC schools

By Sheila Carmody
Senior Writer

The New York Rangers and the New York City Department of Education have something in common these days – each is having a winning year.

While the National Hockey League playoffs get underway and the Rangers attempt to bring home the Stanley Cup, the Education Department is one of five finalists for another coveted trophy – the Broad Prize for Urban Education.

As a finalist, New York City will receive at least \$125,000 in scholarships for graduating seniors. If it wins the grand prize, it will be awarded \$500,000 for scholarships.

The Broad (pronounced “Brode”) Foundation is a philanthropy devoted to urban education. It examines urban districts nationwide and singles out five that have improved student achievement while reducing achievement gaps.

Reform

The Broad Foundation handed out its first prize in 2002, the same year Mayor Michael Bloomberg appointed Joel Klein to be chancellor of the largest school district in the country. With 1,400 schools, more than 1 million students, 80,000 teachers and an annual budget of \$13 billion, it makes other districts look Lilliputian.

Since Klein took over as chancellor, one of his largest investments in support of curriculum has been hiring math and literacy coaches, according to city administrators, who presented the district’s successful reform efforts during the foundation’s symposium last year.

Other components of instructional support reform city administrators credited with improving student achievement included:

- New teacher mentoring program.
- \$1 billion in professional development.
- Expanded teacher recruitment efforts.

City officials also singled out a citywide core curriculum, an end to social promotion, summer success and Saturday academies, new small secondary schools and a leadership academy for school principals.

Prize winners

Based in Los Angeles, the Broad Foundation created the prize to highlight the best practices of urban schools for the benefit of other schools. National Center for Education Accountability researchers compile four years’ worth of K-12 reading and math test scores, SAT and ACT scores, and demographic information to determine the winning district.

New York City was a finalist last year, too. Among the reasons for the city’s high ratings:

- Students at all grade levels have shown a marked increase in math proficiency since 2003.
- Elementary and middle school students performed better than expected in reading, and middle school students performed better than expected in math compared with students in other districts in the state with similar levels of poverty.
- The district narrowed achievement gaps between African-American and Hispanic students and their white counterparts in elementary and high school math and high school reading from 2003 to 2005.

What’s next?

While the Broad prize recognizes improvement, fewer than half of New York City students graduate in four years. Chancellor Klein, who is a member of NYSSBA’s Board of Directors, has said on more than one occasion that the district still has a long way to go.

Last year’s goal of creating signing bonuses and salary differentials to attract more math and science teachers may still be just a goal, but expanding the lead teachers program has been supported by the United Federation of Teachers. More than just coaches, lead teachers spend half their time providing support and expertise to their colleagues and the other half teaching.

The New York Times recently reported that Klein has hired consultants to “rethink” reform efforts, with the long-term goal of decentralizing the system.

Closing student achievement gaps seen as essential to urban progress

By Sheila Carmody
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When the Broad Prize for Urban Education is awarded later this year, who will be the winner?

Probably the students. The competition encourages excellence in urban education.

While countless studies and institutions focus on the weakness of urban schools, the Broad (pronounced “Brode”) Foundation recognizes progress.

The Boston public schools system has been a finalist five years in a row, and New York City has been a finalist for two years.



Photo Barbara Bennett

These Bronx students are among the beneficiaries of Joel Klein’s campaign to improve New York City Schools.

He also announced plans to implement a “value-added” system for evaluating schools. Rather than determining performance based on a school’s collective test scores, the new system will enable administrators to follow individual students from year to year. And each year schools will receive a grade, just like students, from A to F. (See story, page 1.)

The goal of future reforms, according to the news report, is to give more autonomy and authority to school principals.

Critics say the limitations of state

and federal mandates and the constraints of union contracts make that impossible. But Klein has said he is looking for ways to decentralize the system and potentially eliminate jobs at the department level.

And while principals have been in a tug-of-war for three years with the city’s Education Department over their contract, *The New York Times* quoted Klein as saying that he envisions “a school system unlike anything the city has seen, with the school the primary drivers of decisions, and administration acting in service to them.”

Other 2006 finalists are:

- Bridgeport (Conn.) Public Schools
- Jersey City (N.J.) School District
- Miami-Dade (Fla.) County Public Schools

The majority of students in all of the schools are minority students living in poverty. The figure is 96 percent in the case of Bridgeport.

That’s the criteria for the \$1 million prize – urban districts that improve student achievement while reducing achievement gaps among ethnic groups and between high- and low-income students. It’s the largest education award – \$500,000 given to the top school district – in the country.

The inaugural winner of the Broad Prize for Urban Education was the

Houston Independent School District, followed by two California districts – Long Beach Unified School District in 2003 and Garden Grove Unified School District in 2004. Norfolk (Va.) Public Schools won last year.

The mission of the Broad Foundation is “to dramatically improve urban public education through better governance, management and labor relations.” It was created by Eli Broad, founder-chairman of AIG Retirement Services Inc. (formerly SunAmerica Inc.) and KB Home (formerly Kaufman and Broad Home Corporation).