Uncommon Schools Wins 2013 Broad Prize for Public Charter Schools

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WASHINGTON, D.C.—Uncommon Schools is the winner of the 2013 Broad Prize for Public Charter Schools and will receive $250,000 to support college-readiness efforts for their students, The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation announced today.

Uncommon Schools is a network of 32 public charter schools across Massachusetts, New Jersey and New York, serving more than 7,900 students. More than 78 percent of students are low-income, and 98 percent are African-American or Hispanic. Uncommon Schools students are outperforming their low-income and African-American peers in the states where they operate, and they have closed income and ethnic achievement gaps four times as often as other large charter management organizations across the country.

The Broad (rhymes with “road”) Prize for Public Charter Schools is an annual award to honor the public charter school system that has demonstrated the most outstanding overall student performance and improvement in the nation in recent years while reducing achievement gaps for low-income students and students of color.

The winner was announced by Roberto J. Rodriguez, special assistant to the President for education, at the 2013 National Charter Schools Conference in Washington, D.C. to an audience of more than 4,000 public charter school leaders.

A nine-member review board of prominent education researchers, policy leaders, practitioners and executives from around the country evaluated publicly available student achievement data on 27 large established charter school systems. They selected the top three public charter systems—Achievement First, KIPP Foundation and Uncommon Schools—and ultimately found that Uncommon Schools had the best overall student academic performance between 2009 and 2012. The Broad Foundation did not play a role in selecting the winner.

“While we congratulate Uncommon Schools for their progress in raising student achievement and their steadfast commitment to ensuring that every child—regardless of family income or background—deserves a world-class education, the real winners are the students who are served by these and other high-quality charter management organizations,” said Rebecca Wolf DiBiase, managing director of programs for The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation. “It is our hope that the success of Uncommon Schools serves as an example for traditional public schools and others in the charter sector of what is possible.”

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At the core of Uncommon’s philosophy is the belief that a student’s family income shouldn’t determine his or her opportunities in life. Uncommon Schools all share key attributes: a college-preparatory mission; high standards for academics and character; a highly structured learning environment; a longer school day and longer school year; a focus on accountability and data-driven instruction; and a faculty of committed and talented leaders and teachers.

Among the reasons Uncommon Schools won the 2013 Broad Prize for Public Charter Schools:

- In 2012, 100 percent of Uncommon’s seniors took the SAT exam. These seniors achieved an average SAT score of 1570—20 points above the college-readiness benchmark of 1550 established by the College Board.
- In 2012, in 84 percent of available comparisons (elementary, middle and high school reading, math and science), proficiency rates for Uncommon’s low-income students ranked in the top 30 percent of their respective states when compared to low-income students in the rest of that state, according to The Broad Prize methodology. By comparison, The Broad Prize-eligible CMO average was 39 percent.
- In 2012, in 89 percent of available comparisons, proficiency rates for Uncommon’s African-American students ranked in the top 30 percent of their respective states when compared to African-American students in the rest of that state, according to The Broad Prize methodology. By comparison, the eligible CMO average was 57 percent.
- In recent years, Uncommon closed 56 percent of achievement gaps between its low-income students and the state’s non-low-income students across the available comparisons, compared to the eligible CMO average of 13 percent. Uncommon also closed 56 percent of achievement gaps between its African-American students and the state’s white students across the available comparisons, compared to the eligible CMO average of 12 percent.

As the winner of The Broad Prize for Public Charter Schools, Uncommon Schools will receive $250,000 to support low-income student college-readiness efforts of its choice, such as scholarships, speaker series or campus visits.

In selecting the winner, The Broad Prize for Public Charter Schools review board examined publicly available data since the 2008/09 school year collected by RTI International, a leading global research institute. The review board considered student outcomes, scalability, size, poverty and demographics, and selected the charter management organization that it believed showed the most outstanding overall student performance and improvement while reducing achievement gaps. No formula was used. For more information on the methodology and review board, visit http://www.broadprize.org/publiccharterschools/FAQ.html.

Charter management organizations eligible for the 2013 award operated a minimum of five schools for at least four years, had at least 1,500 enrolled each year since 2008/09 and served sizeable percentages of low-income students and students of color. Organizations cannot apply for the award nor be nominated. For a list of eligible organizations, visit http://www.broadprize.org/publiccharterschools/eligible.html. The list of organizations eligible for the 2014 award will be released this fall.
The Broad Prize for Public Charter Schools is the sister award to The Broad Prize for Urban Education that is awarded to traditional public school districts. The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation launched both awards to help schools and school systems across America learn from innovative public school systems producing the strongest student outcomes. The Broad Foundation will release data summary analyses on all organizations eligible for the award next month, followed by the research-based best practice findings from a site visit to Uncommon Schools this fall.

“Uncommon Schools is a shining example of great public charter schools changing the course of children’s lives,” said Nina Rees, CEO of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. “By narrowing the achievement gap for low-income students and students of color, Uncommon is driving learning at an accelerated rate for thousands of students. I commend their work and encourage all public schools to learn from their success.”

Founded by entrepreneur Eli Broad and his wife Edythe, both graduates of Detroit Public Schools, The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation is a philanthropy that seeks to ensure that every student in an urban public school has the opportunity to succeed. Bringing together top education experts and practitioners, the foundation funds system-wide programs and policies that strengthen public schools by creating environments that allow good teachers to do great work and enable students of all backgrounds to learn and thrive. For more information, visit www.broadeducation.org.

Note: to request photos of the event, contact kdenne@broadfoundation.org.

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