America’s Top Urban Public Charter School System Eradicates Achievement Gaps, Sends All Students to College

Broad Foundation releases research on best practices of Houston’s YES Prep Public Schools, winner of Broad Prize for Public Charter Schools

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LOS ANGELES – A report detailing the practices behind the 2012 Broad Prize for Public Charter Schools winner’s success in eliminating achievement gaps and reaching 100 percent college admission for all its students was released today by The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation.

The report details how YES Prep Public Schools, a network of 11 middle and high schools in Houston, has achieved unprecedented success with a high-poverty, high-minority student population. Since YES Prep’s inception in 1998, all of its seniors have graduated from high school and been accepted to four-year colleges and universities, and more than 90 percent of its students attend college without the need for remediation.

RMC Research Corporation, a national education consulting company, led a team of education researchers and practitioners through a four-day site visit to YES Prep. RMC evaluated the school system against a research-based framework and multiple rubrics of effective charter school and school system policies and practices. Researchers interviewed administrators, teachers, principals, parents, students and community leaders, analyzed extensive documents, and observed classrooms.

Among the strategies researchers found likely to be contributing to YES Prep’s outstanding results with low-income and minority students:

1. Challenging curriculum back-mapped from objectives measured by Advanced Placement exams
2. Longer school days and a longer school year
3. Talented teachers and administrators carefully selected based on qualities exhibited by YES Prep’s most successful teachers and administrators
4. Regular teacher professional development, coaching and individualized support
5. Character building and community service integrated into the academic curriculum
6. Preparation for students to thrive in a “college culture,” including travel opportunities to colleges and other trips, as well as assistance with college and financial aid applications, so students can envision themselves as successful college students
7. Critical academic and social-emotional support for students even after high school on their college campuses
8. Continuous improvement loops built into strategies

“YES Prep not only implements a challenging curriculum, rigorous instruction, careful teacher selection and in-depth professional development for teachers and administrators, but also goes beyond these methods to address other student needs, such as building student character and motivating students—during and after high school, enabling students to envision themselves as successful college students,” said Dr. Shelley Billig, vice president of RMC Research Corporation and the lead researcher of the report. “Together, these strategies represent a winning combination to help disadvantaged students both graduate high school on time and thrive in college.”

The Broad (rhymes with “road”) Prize for Public Charter Schools is an annual award honoring urban public charter school systems that have demonstrated the most outstanding overall student performance and improvement in the nation in recent years while reducing achievement gaps for poor and minority students. YES Prep was chosen as the 2012 winner by a 14-member review board of prominent education researchers, policy leaders, practitioners and executives from around the country who evaluated publicly available student achievement data on 20 large established urban charter school systems. The Broad Foundation did not play a role in selecting the winner.

From 2007 to 2011, publicly available data shows that YES Prep had the best overall student academic performance. For example, YES Prep eliminated nearly all income and ethnic achievement gaps, and its students outperformed higher income and white peers statewide in most cases, achieved higher average Advanced Placement participation and passing rates than their peer average and outperformed their peer average on SAT participation and scores.

“This groundbreaking report reveals what makes this public school system work,” said Nina Rees, CEO of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. “I encourage charter school practitioners and policy-makers alike to use these findings to help many more public schools—charter and traditional—learn from this successful model.”

For more information about YES Prep’s student outcomes and The Broad Prize for Public Charter Schools, visit: http://www.broadprize.org/publiccharterschools/2012.html.

The winner of the 2013 Broad Prize for Public Charter Schools will be announced July 2 at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools conference in Washington, D.C.
For a list of organizations eligible for the 2013 award: http://broadprize.org/publiccharterschools/eligible.html. Organizations cannot apply for the award nor be nominated.

Founded by self-made 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.

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