LOS ANGELES—The $1 million Broad Prize for Urban Education, which for the last 13 years has been awarded to public school systems that have demonstrated the greatest overall performance and improvement in student achievement while narrowing gaps among low-income students and students of color, will be paused while The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation updates the award to better reflect and recognize the changing landscape of K-12 public education.

Over the past decade, public school systems have evolved to include public charter management organizations, alternative systems like New Orleans’s Recovery School District and Tennessee’s Achievement School District and “portfolio” districts that include a mix of traditional and charter schools. Many of these districts, with support from The Broad Foundation, are creating innovative governance models that give families high-quality school options and empower teachers and school leaders to do what’s best for their students.

The decision to pause the prize was further precipitated by sluggish academic results from the largest urban school districts in the country. Previously, 75 of the largest public school districts in the country were automatically eligible for The Broad Prize each year. A review board of education experts reviewed performance data and selected the finalists. Since 2002, there have always been four or five finalists. Last year, the review board advanced only two districts to a selection jury for consideration, and the jury of prominent leaders, including former U.S. secretaries of education, decided to award the 2014 Broad Prize to both finalists.

“The rise of a new definition of public school systems, coupled with more rigorous standards and higher expectations for our public schools, convinced us that now is the right time to take a break and evaluate The Broad Prize to ensure it fulfills its original mission: to catalyze dramatic improvement in America’s public schools,” said Bruce Reed, president of The Broad Foundation. “We want to make sure any award recognizes the best achievement in K-12 public education today while incentivizing school systems to raise student achievement to the highest level.”

While The Broad Foundation considers how to evolve The Broad Prize, it will continue to award the $250,000 Broad Prize for Public Charter Schools. That award was introduced in 2012 to recognize high-performing charter management organizations that have proved high achievement is possible in public schools that serve the most disadvantaged students.

“It is our hope that The Broad Prize for Public Charter Schools, and any future Broad Prize, will inspire educators across the country to work with heightened urgency and creativity to make sure every student achieves at high levels,” Reed said. “American public schools are improving, but we need to move faster. The families and children who are counting on their schools can’t afford to wait.”
Since 2002, The Broad Foundation has awarded $16 million in scholarships to students in Broad Prize finalist and winning districts, enabling more than 1,200 low-income students who improved their high school grades to go on to college. The foundation will award scholarships this spring to the 2014 winning districts—Gwinnett County Public Schools and Orange County Public Schools—and will continue renewing scholarships for Broad Prize scholars who are still in school.

In addition, the foundation will continue awarding grants to school districts for diagnostic site visits. These visits by researchers mirror the one-week review that is conducted at Broad Prize finalist districts to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the district. The researchers use The Broad Prize rubric to evaluate district policies and practices that affect teaching and learning, district leadership, and operations and support systems.

“We plan to continue offering these diagnostic audits in the hopes that districts will use the comprehensive findings as a roadmap for systemic improvement,” Reed said.

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, please visit www.broadeducation.org.

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