

BRIDGEPORT SCHOOLS ON PRIZE LIST

Cited By Foundation As Improved District

By **DAVID LIGHTMAN**
WASHINGTON BUREAU CHIEF

WASHINGTON — The Bridgeport public school system won \$125,000 Tuesday as a finalist for the **Broad Foundation Prize**, which recognizes the nation's most improved urban school districts.

The New York City Department of Education won the top \$500,000 award. Runners-up included Bridgeport, the Long Beach (Calif.) Unified School District, the Miami-Dade County (Fla.) schools and the Northside Independent School District in San Antonio.

Bridgeport Superintendent John J. Ramos Sr. said the money will be used for college scholarships. The district was a finalist last year, too, and used the money to help 14 students.

Ramos was upbeat after the elaborate 90-minute ceremony at the Library of Congress, where the grand prize was announced by Education Secretary Margaret Spellings.

"This is like the Oscars for public education," she said.

Rep. Christopher Shays, R-4th District, said, "This is a tremendous boost to the city of Bridgeport."

Eli Broad, the foundation's founder, said New York was chosen because "if it can be done in New York City, it can be done anywhere."

Achievements cited for New York City included the fact that in reading and math at all grade levels last year, its schools outperformed other districts in New York state that serve students with similar income levels.

Bridgeport, with 34 schools and 21,722 students, was lauded for similar success. The system's student population is 46 percent Hispanic and 42 percent African American. Ninety five percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches.

Among the points cited by the foundation jury, which consisted of former U.S. secretaries of education, corporate officials and members of Congress:

■ Using the prize's methodology, Bridgeport outperformed similar districts in Connecticut in math and reading at all

grade levels.

■ The city's low-income, African American and Hispanic students outperformed their peers in similar Connecticut districts.

■ The city showed more improvement than other districts in the state serving students at similar income levels in math at all grade levels, and in elementary and middle school reading.

■ Bridgeport "narrowed the achievement gap between the district's Hispanic students and the state average for white students" in reading and math at all grade levels.

Contact David Lightman at dlightman@courant.com.

