

Northside ISD gets \$125,000 in scholarships

As a finalist for prize, district is allotted the money for progress in minority achievement.

BY GARY MARTIN
 EXPRESS-NEWS WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON — They came for the brass ring and grabbed runner-up status instead, but Northside Independent School District educators were feeling good about taking home \$125,000 in college scholarships Tuesday as one of four finalists for the 2007 Broad Prize in Urban Education.

About a dozen Northside administrators and board members were on hand at the Library of Congress, where the winner — the New York City Department of Education — was announced by Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and former Secretary of State Colin Powell spoke at a luncheon for the honorees.

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The \$500,000 top prize is given annually to the urban school district that demonstrates the greatest overall performance and improvement. The prize money is donated by philanthropist Eli Broad, a real estate baron who has made public education a philanthropic priority. Each of the four finalist districts will get \$125,000.

"It is really an honor to be nominated," Spellings said. "Everybody is a winner."

She said that, in many cases, Board Prize nominees often outperform their suburban peers, achieving higher participation rates by minorities taking college admission tests and closing the achievement gap between ethnic and economic groups.

Northside, the fourth-largest school district in Texas, has 85,000 students. Hispanics make up 62 percent of the students; Anglos, 26 percent; and African Americans, 8 percent.

One of the fastest-growing districts in Texas, Northside is increasing by 4,000 students each year.

Katie Reed, president of Northside's board of trustees, said the selection of the district as a finalist was recognition that "we are doing a great job."

Other finalists were Bridgeport Public Schools in Connecticut, Long Beach Unified School District in California and Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

U.S. Rep. Charlie Gonzalez, D-San Antonio, said Northside embraced the challenge of educating a large, diverse student body with innovative programs.

"They were able to get their arms around the challenge," Gonzalez said.

The judges found that African American and Hispanic students from Northside outperformed their peers from other Texas school districts in 2006 in reading and math at all grade levels.

Students at Northside also showed the greatest overall improvement, from 2003 to 2006, of peer Texas schools across all ethnic and income levels in reading and math.

Participation by Hispanic and African American students taking the standardized test for college admission also increased for students in Northside during that period.

During a panel discussion, Superintendent John Folks said the most important initiative implemented at Northside allowed teachers to see and compare data on every student.

Folks also said it was important to get the community and other groups involved in new education initiatives.

"You have to have strong communication: to your staff, to your community, to everyone

involved," Folks said. "We have to show people and convince people that that is what is going to be best for the kids."

The Education Department will begin notifying students about the scholarships and encouraging them to apply. Scholarships of \$10,000 are available for students attending four-year universities and colleges. Students applying to two-year schools can receive \$2,500.

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