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Special Commissioner

NEWS RELEASE
June 30, 1999

PRESS CONFERENCE – 11 A.M.

Rikers Island School Inflates Enrollment

Today, Special Commissioner of Investigation Edward F. Stancik released a report entitled *JAILHOUSE MATH: An Investigation Into The Inflation Of Enrollment At Rikers Island Educational Facility*, that describes how Sharon Jones, principal of Rikers Island Educational Facility (“RIEF”), repeatedly inflated her school register and prevented her staff from discharging former students, apparently in order to secure more resources for her school. The report focuses on the spring 1997 semester and the 1997-98 school year and exposes the following malfeasance:

- Reported enrollment in 1997 was more than double the true enrollment at RIEF.
- For example, in the fall of 1997 RIEF’s reported enrollment of 1,688 students was more than 900 higher than the true enrollment. The vast majority of these students had apparently been released from Rikers, but were retained on the school’s rolls nonetheless.
- The names of hundreds of former students were retained on class lists for months and sometimes for over a year after they had left the school.
- In one of the most egregious examples, a student who attended RIEF for only ten days in September 1996 was listed as enrolled at RIEF for the next 17 months, and was not discharged from RIEF until May 1998.
- Jones prohibited her staff from removing the names of former students from the school register and threatened teachers that they would lose their jobs if the school’s enrollment declined.
- Jones inflated the school’s enrollment by hundreds of students when submitting budget requests, and as a result, RIEF received more resources than it was entitled to.

The report goes beyond Jones’s misconduct, and reveals how her superiors in the Board of Education blindly accepted Jones’s inflated budget requests and did not check the accuracy of her numbers, although even a cursory review of the Board of Education’s own records would have highlighted that something was wrong.

In addition, at the same time that Jones was inflating her school’s enrollment, she made little or no effort to ensure that former students entered a new school upon being released from Rikers Island. In fact, the Board of Education could provide no evidence that anyone on the RIEF staff had worked to make sure these at-risk children returned to school upon their release from custody.

The Special Commissioner recommends that Principal Sharon Jones’s employment with the Board of Education be terminated and that other RIEF employees be strongly disciplined for their involvement with this scheme. Furthermore, the Commissioner makes several procedural recommendations to ensure that accurate enrollment and attendance statistics are maintained at RIEF in the future.