CITY OF NEW YORK

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE March 17, 2009

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DOE Custodian Steals Nearly \$100,000 in DOE Funds in "No Show" Job Scheme Report Released Today

Today, Special Commissioner of Investigation Richard J. Condon released a report detailing an investigation which found that 32-year-old New York City Department of Education ("DOE") School Custodian Philip Portelli stole more than \$99,000 in DOE funds from the custodial payroll of West Side High School ("WSHS") in Manhattan. Portelli created a "no show" job in the name of a friend, Paul Azzopardi, age 27. Although Azzopardi performed no work at the school, for more than two years the custodian forged and cashed checks in Azzopardi's name and shared some of the cash with him. The investigation also determined that Portelli granted overtime compensation to custodial workers even though they performed no extra work, and he demanded – and in one instance received – cash kickbacks from those receiving the unearned premium pay. Portelli also dispatched DOE custodial workers to perform cleaning chores at private apartment buildings in Manhattan during their work shifts at WSHS.

The investigation further revealed that Mary Mortenson, 26, the WSHS payroll secretary who was aware of Portelli's "no show" scheme with Azzopardi, paid herself for nearly 50 hours which were required to be uncompensated lunch breaks. Portelli also allowed Mortenson to be paid for at least six days on which she did not appear at the school, and he regularly permitted Lorraine Vasquez, 37, a night cleaner at WSHS, to leave before the end of her scheduled shift while receiving full pay.

(More ...)

Portelli has been reassigned from WSHS as a result of this investigation, and is not currently working in a DOE school. Commissioner Condon has recommended that Portelli, Mortenson and Velasquez be dismissed from their DOE positions, and that they – along with Azzopardi – be placed on the ineligible list and barred from future employment with the DOE or its affiliates. The Commissioner has also referred his findings to New York County District Attorney Robert M. Morgenthau for whatever action he may deem appropriate.

The Office of the Special Commissioner of Investigation is part of the New York City Department of Investigation and Special Commissioner Condon reports to Commissioner Rose Gill Hearn.

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