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Grand Illusion:
An Investigation into Enrollment and Attendance Manipulation
at Brandeis High School

In a report released today, Special Commissioner of Investigation for the New York City School District Edward F. Stancik documents how student attendance and enrollment figures at Louis D. Brandeis High School in Manhattan were inflated over the past decade. The report describes several deceptive schemes at Brandeis, starting several years ago with the manipulation of attendance reports, and culminating with nonexistent "phantom classes" in the 1996-97 academic year. The report also traces the origin and evolution of these schemes from 1990, the year in which Marlene Lazar became Principal of Brandeis, to 1998.

The phantom classes consisted of dropouts and chronic truants, whose names were used without their knowledge or consent. By using the bogus classes to bolster enrollment, Brandeis received more resources. However, the resources gained by this fraud were of no benefit to Brandeis students. Lazar built a huge bureaucracy by taking teachers from the classroom and assigning them to administrative jobs as "perks." Brandeis had one of the worst records in the city in terms of teacher time spent on instruction.

Within her first two years as principal of Brandeis, Lazar instructed the school's computer services coordinator to alter attendance records every month by changing enough student absences to lates to reach whatever percentage goal she specified. As attendance rates increased year to year, so too did Lazar's reputation as an administrator who could bring students back to a troubled school.

The report ultimately reviews the flawed Board of Education attendance procedures that facilitated the fraud at Brandeis, and makes recommendations to prevent other unscrupulous administrators from manipulating the records of unsuspecting students.