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**New Yorkers Speak Out on *No Child Left Behind Act*
Bring Community Voice to Federal Law**

Students and parents frustrated by poor communication and lack of timely information on school performance; express growing concerns over testing

NEW YORK CITY – New Yorkers expressed growing concerns about the impact of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) on local public schools and communities at a public hearing Thursday night to discuss the landmark education law. As NCLB enters its fifth year of implementation, the hearing, hosted by the Washington DC-based Public Education Network (PEN), and the New York-based Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc. (CFE), and co-sponsored by the National Center for Schools and Communities at Fordham University and Good Schools for All of Buffalo, provided citizens across the state with a unique opportunity to share their views on the law, and provide state and federal lawmakers with first-hand accounts of how NCLB is playing out in New York schools and communities.

At Thursday night's hearing, students hailing from Queens, Brooklyn, Manhattan, the Bronx and New Rochelle offered a direct view into their schools, and expressed concerns over what they described as an over-emphasis on testing. Students overwhelmingly agreed that a single test should not determine a student's future, and cited teacher quality, crowded classrooms, lack of science labs and outdated textbooks as persistent challenges.

"We have two-month old metal detectors protecting 20-year old books," said Terel Watson, a junior at Queens Vocational and Technical High School.

Parents expressed frustration over the lack of communication and timely information from schools about school performance and services available to students. While NCLB requires reporting of school and student performance through annual report cards, parents testified that school information rarely reaches parents, and when it does, it is often late and difficult to understand. In particular, parents expressed the need for timely information about supplemental educational services and recommended that school data be made available in multiple languages. Parents also testified that they often feel unwelcome by administrators at the school and district levels, making it difficult for them to get involved.

"Parent and community involvement are critical to ensuring that the goals of No Child Left Behind are met," said PEN President Wendy D. Puriefoy. "High expectations and accountability will only work when citizens have the information and tools they need to make informed decisions and play a meaningful role in school reform."

In addition to concerns over NCLB, parents also shared their expectations for New York public schools. While they agree that academics are important, parents testified that schools should prepare their children for life and that students should graduate with the skills they need to communicate and express themselves. Parents also felt that subjects like art and music are too often sacrificed due to an increased focus on testing.

Thursday night's hearing at St. John's University's Manhattan Campus featured testimony from parents, students and community leaders before a panel of state and national leaders from higher education, philanthropy, journalism and advocacy organizations about what is working and what is not under the landmark reform legislation. Topics of discussion included: testing and accountability; teacher quality; access to timely and understandable information about school and student performance; and school and community partnerships. Participants explored the role that communities can play to help achieve the goal of high quality public education for all students, and offered recommendations for what local leaders and national policymakers should do to make sure the law works for every student.

"This hearing and its outcomes present an opportunity for New Yorkers," said CFE's Executive Director, Michael A. Rebell, "many of whom are already thinking about how best to spend the additional funding that will soon be flowing from the *CFE v. State* litigation, to consider ways that NCLB can be used to support effective programs in our schools."

The New York hearing is the first in a series of ten public hearings that will be sponsored by PEN with state and regional partners across the country. Subsequent hearings will be held in Massachusetts, Texas, Pennsylvania, Florida, Tennessee, California, Michigan, Ohio and Illinois between now and early 2006. Last year more than 1,700 citizens attended similar public hearings held by PEN and its partners nationwide, and 12,000 citizens completed an online survey to give their opinion on NCLB. Together their ideas and compelling testimony provided a resounding public voice on NCLB.

The results of the 2005 hearings, in addition to testimony provided online at www.GiveKidsGoodSchools.org, will be published and distributed to key federal, state, and local decision makers, education leaders, the media and the public and will include suggested changes and improvements to this far-reaching law. Additional information about PEN and the 2005 hearings can be found at www.PublicEducation.org.

Funding for the New York hearing was provided by The New York Community Trust.

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Public Education Network (www.PublicEducation.org) is a national organization of local education funds (LEFs) and individuals working to improve public schools and build public support for quality public education for poor and disadvantaged children in low-income communities across the nation. PEN and its 88 LEF members work in 34 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico on behalf of 11.5 million children in more than 16,000 schools, seeking to bring the community voice into the debate on quality public education in the firm belief that an active, vocal constituency will ensure every child, in every community, a quality public education.

Founded in 1993, **The Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc.** (www.cfequity.org), a not-for-profit corporation, is a coalition of parent organizations, community school boards, concerned citizens and advocacy groups. We seek to reform New York State's school finance system to ensure adequate resources and the opportunity for a sound basic education for all students in New York City. Our efforts will also help secure the same opportunity for students throughout the state who are not currently receiving a sound basic education.