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CONTACT
Eva Moon, (312) 322-4880
Allison Thomas, (202) 572-2936

**Public Hearing Gives Voice to Community Anger,
Frustration Around *No Child Left Behind***

Lack of information about the federal law, inadequate resources and increased emphasis on testing fuel parent and student concerns

CHICAGO, IL – Students, parents and business leaders called for equitable funding, relevant information and increased opportunities for parent and community involvement at a public hearing Thursday night to discuss the federal *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB). As increasing numbers of Illinois public schools face sanctions under NCLB (238 public schools will be in some phase of restructuring during the 2005-2006 school year, 185 of them in Chicago), the hearing provided citizens from across the state a forum to share their views and make recommendations on how to improve the landmark education law.

At Thursday night's hearing, sponsored by the Washington, DC-based Public Education Network and the Chicago-based Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, students hailing from across Chicago spoke of growing emphasis on standardized tests and the pressures to perform. Students and parents agreed that standardized tests should not be the only measure of school and individual performance, and also cited lack of adequate resources like computer labs, quality tutoring services and textbooks as persistent challenges to achievement.

"We have textbooks in shreds," said Terri Shields, a senior at a local CPS high school. "If my books are from 1990 and their books are from 2004, then I'm more than a decade behind."

A call for equitable school funding rang throughout the hearing as witnesses testified that without the same resources as their more affluent counterparts, low-performing schools face an uphill push to meet NCLB requirements. Witnesses also discussed concern around the need for highly qualified teachers, and stressed the need to implement proven strategies to help schools that fail to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) reach their goals.

"We have been 'reconstituted,' we have been 'intervened,' and we are still a failing school," said Wanda Evans, a teacher at Applied Arts Science and Technology Academy. "We will never get out of that status with what the law is asking for."

"As more is known about NCLB, the greater the opposition grows," said Diana Nelson, Executive Director of the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform. "The public is realizing that punitive sanctions don't fix failing schools, tutoring programs and options to transfer don't solve the problems of public schools that need resources and capacity building, and schools that have made outstanding progress can still be labeled failing if they haven't met the absolute

standard set by the legislation, however much they may have improved their test scores. In short, I'd say the law is failing."

Among recommendations, witnesses expressed a desire for meaningful education and training on what parents and community members can do to get involved in their schools, and suggested greater coordination between schools and the community.

"Too often the public is not involved in the decisions about implementation of No Child Left Behind," said PEN President Wendy D. Puriefoy. "The promise of good schools for all will not be fully realized until every member of the public – business leaders, parents, grandparents, students, community leaders and everyday citizens – demand that schools be the best they can be."

More than 100 citizens attended the public hearing at Garfield Park Fieldhouse where a panel of state and national leaders from education, philanthropy, and advocacy organizations facilitated discussion of issues related to NCLB including: testing and accountability; teacher quality; and the role that communities can play to help achieve the goal of high quality public education for all students.

The Chicago hearing is one of ten public hearings that will be sponsored by PEN with state and regional partners across the country. The first of these hearings was held in New York City in September. Subsequent hearings will be held in Massachusetts, Texas, Pennsylvania, Florida, Tennessee, California, Michigan and Ohio between now and Winter 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.

The results of the 2005 hearings, in addition to testimony provided online at www.GiveKidsGoodSchools.org, will be published and distributed to key decision makers at the federal, state, and local levels, and will include suggested changes and improvements to this far-reaching law.

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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 89 LEF members work in 34 states and the District of Columbia on behalf of 11.1 million children in more than 1200 school districts, 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.

The **Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform** (www.crosscity.org) is a national network of school reform leaders from Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, Oakland, Philadelphia and Seattle. We are parents, community members, students, teachers, principals, central office administrators, researchers, union officials and funders working together to improve public schools and education for young people. Our mission is to develop knowledge and build capacity in urban public schools, districts, families, and communities to create high quality and equitable teaching and learning so all young people are well prepared for post-secondary education, work and civic participation.