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For Immediate Release
January 30, 2005

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**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S ADMITTED MISCALCULATION OF
CLASS SIZE NUMBERS LEADS TO CALL FOR STATE AUDIT**

DOE's Use of Millions in State and City Funds Meant to Reduce Class Size Called Into Question

City Hall, NY – City Council Speaker Gifford Miller, Council Member Robert Jackson (plaintiff in CFE lawsuit), New York State Senate Deputy Minority Leader Eric T. Schneiderman and education advocates held a press conference at City Hall today. They are calling on State Comptroller Alan Hevesi to audit Department of Education (DOE) data on class sizes in New York City public schools.

"While our children go to schools bursting at the seams from overcrowding, the DOE refuses to answer New Yorkers' questions," said Speaker Miller. "Numerous experts have said class size has an enormous impact on our children and how they learn. This issue is too big for the DOE to demurely say, 'Oops,' then move on as if it were not a problem."

"I'm fighting everyday in Albany to secure the increased funding for New York City schools that the Court of Appeals mandated in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity case," said Senator Schneiderman. "But, our efforts in Albany are undermined when the Mayor and the Department of Education fail to adequately explain their use of funding that has already been allocated."

"The courts ruled and every educator knows that large classes in New York City are affecting our children's ability to learn," said Council Member Jackson, referring to the Campaign for Fiscal Equity case. "The fact that the DOE has not been able to lower class size with current funds underscores the need for the Governor to get the CFE money to New York City right away."

Leonie Haimson of *Class Size Matters* requested that the New York City Independent Budget Office conduct an analysis of the DOE's class size data. The IBO found that despite reduced enrollment, the average class size for grades K – 3 went up in 15 school districts last year, while declining in only 14. The IBO also found that for the first time in six years since the state program began, average Kindergarten class sizes increased citywide, from 20.7 to 20.9 children per class.

Both these figures for average Kindergarten class size differ substantially from the official data reported by the Department of Education, in the Mayor's Management Report and elsewhere, in which DOE officials claimed that average Kindergarten class sizes were 20.4 and 20.3 for these two years. In a recent letter, DOE officials have admitted releasing inaccurate class size data, by including in their calculations non-existent classes of long-term absent students.

The IBO also found that the city has released inaccurate figures for new classrooms formed, in their official reports to the State Education Department on their use of the class size reduction funds. As the IBO letter says, ***"... the city reported a higher number of new classes formed than IBO found in its analysis of the data."*** Indeed, according to the IBO data, during the 2003-4 school year, NYC public schools had only 540 more classes in these grades than before the state program began, rather than the 1,586 that DOE claims to have created with these funds.

The lack of progress in reducing class size is a direct effect of a sharp decline in the total number of classrooms in grades K-3 over the last three years. In fact, City schools had an estimated 600 fewer classes in grades K – 3 than during the 2000 – 2001 school year, and 400 fewer than 1999 – 2000, when the program was funded at \$48 million compared to \$88 million last year.

"The sharp decline in the overall number of classrooms appears to violate the state regulations, and we need to get to the bottom of what is happening, so that our children are provided with the same benefits of smaller classes as children in the rest of the state already receive," said Haimson.

The IBO findings related to class size and actual number of classrooms formed call into question the DOE's use of the estimated \$88 million it received last year from the New York State Early Grade Reduction Program. Also, The City Council fought to secure some \$35 million for class size reduction this fiscal year, which the mayor cut in his preliminary budget for next year, supposed to be used to create an additional 225 classes in grades K-3.

Class size is a critical issue for New York City's more than one million public school students, members of the group gathered said. Many of the current initiatives to reduce class size have targeted lower grades (K – 3) because these represent a critical time in a child's education. This problem highlights the need for closure in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit, members added.

"This issue also underscores how critical it is to provide more accountability for the use of the CFE funds," said Haimson. "We have to ensure that there is sufficient public scrutiny and oversight, so that any additional dollars go straight to the classroom where they belong, rather than used to enlarge the bureaucracy at Tweed or to hire more private contractors or consultants."

"While the State and City continue to battle over funds that are due public school students, children are being herded through a system with inadequate resources and a poor teacher to child ratio. Our future hangs on the education of our children. They will be the future doctors, scientists, teachers and community leaders IF they are given the opportunity for a quality education," added Speaker Miller.