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Special Commissioner

NEWS RELEASE
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**PRESS CONFERENCE AT 11 A.M.
25 BROADWAY, 8TH FLOOR**

After Fourteen Arrests Teacher Still Employed by the NYC BOE

Edward F. Stancik, Special Commissioner of Investigation for the New York City School District, today released the results of his investigation regarding the employment of Veronica Hernandez, a fourth grade teacher of English as a Second Language at PS 91 in District 10 in the Bronx. Hernandez has a long criminal record encompassing arrests and convictions before and during her employment with the Board of Education (BOE).

In total, Hernandez has had fourteen arrests. Of these, six resulted in criminal convictions, one was a plea to a violation, and five matters are pending. She has also been jailed for Contempt of Court in connection with one of her cases. Many of the charges against her have involved the shoplifting of expensive items, such as coats from Bloomingdale's. Hernandez has had severe attendance problems at work, missing nearly 200 days without an excuse from the time she was hired in 1993 to the present. Notwithstanding her ongoing criminal conduct and frequent absences, she received "satisfactory" evaluations year after year until she received tenure in 1996. The principal at PS 91 went so far as to call Hernandez "the best teacher in the school."

It was not until December 1998, some nine months after Hernandez's tenth arrest, that the BOE recommended disciplinary charges against the teacher. Then, it still took more than a year before the charges actually were brought. During that time, Hernandez was arrested three more times and was held in contempt of court. In all, she spent more than two years assigned to the District 10 office, awaiting disciplinary charges and proceedings. The teacher was paid throughout that period, while the BOE spent over \$100,000 for her replacement in the classroom.

In a letter to Chancellor Harold Levy, Commissioner Stancik recommended that Hernandez's employment be terminated. He also urged the BOE to bring disciplinary charges against employees far more quickly, particularly where the individual awaiting action is receiving a salary essentially for doing nothing. This investigation also raised concerns about the standard required for a teacher to receive a "satisfactory" evaluation and, thus, to qualify for tenure. That standard must have more meaning. Finally, BOE agencies with information that bears on tenure, such as criminal convictions, must make efforts to communicate better with those who make the critical decisions affecting the granting of tenure.