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CONTACT: Tim Hoefler
(518) 434-3100

TRANSPARENCY WEBSITE UPGRADED

Complete payrolls for four school districts, updated teacher union and school superintendent contracts, and a new interactive user forum have been added today to SeeThroughNY.net, the government transparency website sponsored by the Empire Center for New York State Policy.

The site's searchable public payroll database--featuring names, titles and salaries of more than 800,000 government employees--now includes the 2008 payrolls of the Central Islip, East Islip, Nyack and Syracuse school districts. Additional school district payrolls will be added to the SeeThroughNY database soon, according to Tim Hoefler, the Empire Center's communication director and coordinator of the transparency website.

Today's updates also include newly negotiated contracts for 158 teacher unions and 126 superintendents throughout New York. Contacts for every school and BOCES district in the state can be downloaded from the SeeThroughNY website. Also included in today's "Version 2.0" launch is the SeeThroughNY Forum, a social networking tool that enables users to share, analyze and compare data from counties, cities, town, villages, school districts and public authorities throughout New York.

"This forum will provide the taxpayer, public employee, student and public official an avenue to voice their opinions and observations," Hoefler said. "The discussions on this forum will help set the direction of New York's governments fiscal policies moving forward."

SeeThroughNY also provides searchable payroll databases for the New York State and New York City governments and for 19 state public authorities, including the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. Also posted are legislative member items, operations spending by members of the Legislature, and a benchmarking tool allowing users to search, analyze and compare expenditure data from local governments. The website has attracted more than 875,000 unique visitors, who have downloaded more than 3.5 million pages of information, since it was launched on July 31, 2008.

The Albany-based Empire Center is a project of the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, one of the nation's leading non-profit 501(c)3 think tanks.