

Charter schools founder & superintendent pleads guilty to conspiring to commit bank fraud

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For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of Ohio

COLUMBUS, Ohio – A Central Ohio man who founded and served as the superintendent of two Columbus charter schools pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court here today to conspiring to commit bank fraud.

Abdirizak Y. Farah, 59, admitted to fraudulently using school funds to help purchase his New Albany home.

Farah founded Focus Learning Academy of Northern Columbus (FLANC) on Dublin Granville Road in 2007. The school serves approximately 700 students in kindergarten through eighth grade. Focus Learning Academy of Central Columbus (FLACC) on Cleveland Avenue was founded in 2020 and serves Pre-K through third grade students.

Farah was also employed as a senior policy advisor for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

According to court documents, in August 2020, Farah purchased a \$900,000 home on Lambton Park Road in New Albany. On Aug. 12, two days before his original closing date, Farah requested a \$265,000 wire from a Focus Learning bank account to another person and stated the purpose was for “learning materials.”

That same day, Farah submitted a letter to the bank handling his real estate closing, stating he received \$260,000 in gifted funds that were unrelated to the real estate transaction.

The next day, on Aug. 13, the person who received the wired funds in turn wired \$260,000 to the title company handling the closing.

In the following days, several FLANC vendors made payments totaling approximately \$265,000 to the person who assisted Farah, and that money was returned to FLANC.

As part of his plea, Farah will forfeit \$265,000 to the United States.

"The role of IRS Criminal Investigation becomes even more important in complex financial investigations that can take time to unravel," said Karen Wingerd, Special Agent in Charge, Cincinnati Field Office. "Federal tax laws are normally violated in these types of cases which add additional jail time to sentences. As we often see, the victims are not only American taxpayers, but also individuals and businesses who suffer financial harm."

Conspiracy to commit bank fraud is a crime punishable by up to 30 years in prison. Congress sets the maximum statutory sentence. Sentencing of the defendant will be determined by the Court based on the advisory sentencing guidelines and other statutory factors at a future hearing.

Kenneth L. Parker, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Ohio; James Izzard, Deputy Inspector General, Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General (DHS OIG) Office of Investigations; and Karen Wingerd, Acting Special Agent in Charge, Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigations (IRS-CI) announced the guilty plea offered today before U.S. District Judge Sarah D. Morrison. Assistant United States Attorney David J. Twombly is representing the United States in this case.

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