



Kenneth P. Thompson
District Attorney

DISTRICT ATTORNEY
KINGS COUNTY
350 JAY STREET
BROOKLYN, NY 11201-2908
(718) 250-2000
WWW.BROOKLYNDA.ORG

Office of Public Information
718-250-2300

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Approximately 100 Chinese Immigrant Families Defrauded By Bogus Sunset Park School to Receive Restitution Today

*Defendants Took Deposits of \$300-500 Per Student, Then Disappeared;
Pleaded Guilty and Agreed To Pay \$50,220 to Parents and Teachers*

Kings County District Attorney Kenneth P. Thompson announced that more than \$50,000 in restitution checks will be distributed to families and teachers defrauded by a Brooklyn couple who ran three missionary-type schools in Sunset Park to teach English, and fled with tuition deposits after suddenly shutting down the schools. Approximately \$25,000 will be distributed to families today and the rest will be distributed to teachers at a later date.

District Attorney Thompson will join the families — most of whom are working-class immigrants — at 1 p.m., today at the Brooklyn Chinese American Association, 5000 8th Avenue, Sunset Park.

District Attorney Thompson said, “I am happy to be able to return this money to parents who worked long hours so they could help their children learn English and pursue the American Dream.

“Sadly, they put their immigrant dreams in the hands of people who took advantage of them. My new Immigrant Fraud Unit was instrumental in ensuring that these defendants are held accountable.”

Families of the 130 students will receive a total of \$25,190.79, and 35 teachers will receive a total of \$26,307.93.

The case began on August 14, 2013, when parents, students and teachers found the doors to the Chinatown Outreach Ministry schools locked three weeks before the Summer semester was due to end, and after many of the parents had already paid in advance for the Fall and Spring terms.

The owner-operators of the Chinatown Outreach Ministry, Patrick and Joanne Panettieri, could not be located. Investigators from the District Attorney’s Office arrested them at a motel in Syracuse, New York, two weeks later.

They were charged with first-degree scheme to defraud, grand larceny and petit larceny. Last September they pleaded guilty to first-degree scheme to defraud and petit larceny, and agreed to pay full

restitution in exchange for vacating the felony plea. Patrick Panettieri was sentenced to misdemeanor probation and Joanne Panettieri was sentenced to a conditional discharge.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant District Attorney Lawrence P. Oh of the District Attorney's Investigations Division, under the supervision of William Schaeffer, Chief of the Investigations Division. Assistant District Attorney Maritza Ming, Chief of the Immigrant Fraud Unit, assisted in the case.