

L.A. NOW LOCAL

# College admissions scandal: Wealthy parents told to make deal or face more charges

By RICHARD WINTON  
MAR 19, 2019 | 2:05 PM



Clockwise from top left: J. Mossimo Giannulli and Lori Loughlin; William "Rick" Singer; Felicity Huffman; Yale women's soccer coach Rudy Meredith; former Stanford sailing coach John Vandemoer; USC water polo coach Jovan Vavic. (EPA/Shutterstock; Associated Press; Getty Images; Los Angeles Times)

Federal prosecutors are seeking potential deals with some of the wealthy parents charged in the sweeping college admissions scandal as investigators continue to broaden the case, according to multiple sources with knowledge of the situation.

One source said some of the parents are being given a short window to consider a deal or potentially face additional charges.

It's unclear which parents prosecutors hope to seek out for cooperation, but sources said authorities were interested in getting a better picture of how the scam worked.

The sources requested anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly on the matter.

The push for deals offers hints as to where the case that has rocked American academia is headed.

Federal authorities have said the investigation is ongoing but have not provided details.

Several elite Southern California prep schools have received subpoenas from prosecutors seeking information about some of the students involved in the fraud case. Although the prep schools are not targets of the investigation, prosecutors want to know whether any parents or others accused in the case sought or received help from the schools, sources told The Times.

[FULL COVERAGE: Dozens charged in connection with college admissions scheme »](#)

It remains unclear how many parents took part in the college admissions scam.

The scheme, which began in 2011, centered on a Newport Beach college placement firm run by William “Rick” Singer. Wealthy parents are accused of paying Singer to help their children cheat on college entrance exams and to falsify athletic records of students to enable them to secure admission to elite schools, including UCLA, USC, Stanford, Yale and Georgetown, court records show.

Prosecutors allege that Singer instructed parents to donate funds to a fake charity he had established as part of the scheme. Most of the parents paid at least \$200,000,

but some spent up to \$6.5 million to guarantee their children admission to top universities, authorities said. Parents were then able to deduct the donation from their income taxes, according to the Internal Revenue Service.

The scheme itself was fairly simple, prosecutors said: Singer instructed parents to seek extended time for their children on ACT and SAT exams. In at least one instance, a student claimed to have a learning disability to obtain medical documentation required by the College Board and ACT Inc. to grant additional time on the tests, according to court documents.

College admissions scammers found 'the hole in the Death Star'

MAR 19, 2019 | 6:25 AM

Court documents said Singer had more than 700 clients.

But it is believed that a much smaller group of very wealthy parents took part in the scheme. Some parents interviewed by The Times said they used Singer's firm for

typical college placement services and had nothing to do with bribes.

A key tip that led to what authorities describe as the largest-ever college admissions cheating scandal came from a Los Angeles parent who was under investigation in an unrelated securities case, according to a law enforcement source.

According to court papers, the scam unraveled last year when one of Singer's coaches decided to go off on his own and work directly with a parent.

Rudy Meredith, Yale's women's soccer coach for more than two decades, had previously helped Singer fake the soccer credentials of a child of a Singer client. But in spring 2018, he solicited a bribe directly from the father of a second Yale applicant, whom the Department of Justice designated as "Yale Applicant 2."

What the coach did not know was that the parent took the proposal to federal prosecutors because the parent was already charged in a stock fraud and was looking to cut a deal, according to the court papers.

The source could not confirm whether the father of "Yale Applicant 2" was the L.A. parent.

A source familiar with the prosecution who was not authorized to discuss the investigation and requested anonymity said subpoenas have been served to potential witnesses who worked with Singer, requiring them to appear in Boston next month, but their attorneys are negotiating with prosecutors and agents in Los Angeles.

The moves come as many of the defendants are set to appear in a Boston court later this month.

Actresses Lori Loughlin and Felicity Huffman have hired big-name law firms to represent them in the college admissions cheating scandal.

Huffman was initially represented by top Hollywood criminal defense attorney, Blair Berk, but because the case is in Boston, she will be defended by Marty Murphy of Foley Hoag, while Loughlin is represented by Perry Viscounty of Latham & Watkins.

Former Assistant U.S. Atty. Neema Rahmani of West Coast Trial Lawyers said prosecutors can use their leverage in cases such as the college admissions scandal.

“Almost everyone in these cases cuts a deal and cooperates,” he said. “There is a lot of pressure on the parents to accept responsibility, cooperate and plead guilty. Otherwise, they may be held responsible for the entire amount of the fraud and corresponding prison time under ... the conspiracy charges.

“The government has a lot of leverage here, and I expect most or all of the parents to enter into agreements for lesser offenses and/or fraud amounts,” Rahmani said. “You usually flip the lesser players for the kingpin, and it is unusual here the investigation was done the opposite way.”

Some attorneys, however, have cast doubt about the government’s ability to show who was harmed in the far-reaching scheme.

“It’s not clear that these students would have been rejected had the parents not paid bribes. Would their scores have disqualified them? There’s no way to know that or to establish that other students would have been given their spots,” said Lara Yeretsian, a defense lawyer who has worked on other celebrity cases.

“The parents have already paid the ultimate price. They’ve lost their reputations and their standing in the community. One will likely be disbarred. How much more should they be punished? Most of them could make a good case that they were entrapped.”

---