



U.S. Department of Justice
United States Attorney
Northern District of Illinois

Zachary T. Fardon
United States Attorney

Everett McKinley Dirksen United States Courthouse
219 South Dearborn Street, 5th Floor
Chicago, Illinois 60604
(312) 353-5300

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**FORMER CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS PLEADS GUILTY TO ACCEPTING
BRIBES AND KICKBACKS TO STEER NO-BID CONTRACTS**

CHICAGO — BARBARA BYRD-BENNETT pleaded guilty in federal court today to using her position as chief executive officer of the Chicago Public Schools to guide lucrative no-bid contracts to her former employer in exchange for bribes and kickbacks.

In a written plea agreement, Byrd-Bennett admitted that she steered no-bid contracts worth more than \$23 million to two education-consulting firms, THE SUPES ACADEMY LLC and SYNESI ASSOCIATES LLC. In exchange, Byrd-Bennett expected to receive cash kickbacks from the companies, as well as a consulting job at SUPES upon her retirement from CPS. The kickbacks were to be paid to Byrd-Bennett in the form of a “signing bonus” on the first day of her new employment, according to the plea agreement.

Byrd-Bennett previously worked as a consultant for SUPES and Synesi before moving to CPS in May 2012. She served as CEO at CPS from Oct. 12, 2012, to June 1, 2015.

Byrd-Bennett, 66, of Solon, Ohio, pleaded guilty to one count of wire fraud. She faces a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison, mandatory restitution, and a maximum fine of \$250,000 or twice the gross gain or gross loss resulting from the offense, whichever is greater. The Court will

impose a reasonable sentence under federal sentencing statutes and the advisory United States Sentencing Guidelines.

The Court will schedule a sentencing date at a later time. U.S. District Judge Edmond E. Chang scheduled a status hearing for Jan. 27, 2016, at 9:00 a.m.

In addition to the expected kickback from the contracts, Byrd-Bennett admitted in the plea agreement that the companies provided her with numerous other benefits, including meals and tickets to sporting events.

The Wilmette-based SUPES and the Evanston-based Synesi are also charged in the indictment, along with their respective former owners, GARY SOLOMON, 47, of Wilmette, and THOMAS VRANAS, 34, of Glenview. The four co-defendants are scheduled for an arraignment on Oct. 14, 2015, at 2:00 p.m., before Judge Chang.

Byrd-Bennett's guilty plea was announced by Zachary T. Fardon, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois; John A. Brown, Acting Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation; and Nicholas J. Schuler, Inspector General for the Chicago Public Schools.

The government is represented by Assistant United States Attorneys Megan Cunniff Church and Lindsay Jenkins.

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