

THE ISLAND

Bookkeeper charged in payroll scam

ADVANCE SUPREME COURT BUREAU

SUPREME COURT

A West Brighton woman yesterday pleaded not guilty to charges she scammed the Eden II School for Autistic Children out of \$18,000 since 1995.

The defendant, Mary Topping, 49, of Dubois Avenue, was arraigned in state Supreme Court, St. George, on a 72-count indictment unsealed by Assistant District Attorney Paul Capofari.

The indictment alleges that Ms. Topping, a former bookkeeper for the Elm Park school, would generate payroll checks for part-time employees by manufacturing hours in which they did not work.

Ms. Topping is accused of forging the names of the part-time workers on 34 checks and cashing them between April 28, 1995, and Feb. 14, 1996.

The defendant was fired after her Eden II bosses gathered up the bank records and approached the Staten Island district attorney's office, Capofari said.

The prosecutor contends the fraud was not immediately exposed since the part-timers were not beaten out of any money, and thus unaware of any scam.

"As the bookkeeper, she was in charge of the payroll," Capofari said, adding that Eden II has an outside company do its payroll.

The indictment also alleges Ms. Topping changed some of the information on her personnel records — including her Social Security number — in order to cover her tracks.

Ms. Topping allegedly cashed the forged checks at a bank where Eden II employees were given the courtesy of having their checks cashed even if they did not have an account with that bank. The bank had issued payroll check-cashing cards, of which Ms. Topping, as bookkeeper, was in charge, Capofari said.

"Our theory is that she would take the check-cashing cards, fill one out and then use her signature — forging people's names on the back of checks. There's a lot of paperwork here."

Acting Supreme Court Justice Leonard P. Rienzi set bail at \$2,500 and adjourned the case to Feb. 18. Susan Shatanoff is representing Ms. Topping.

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