

## Child sex abuser from Bedford, extradited from Guatemala, pleads guilty

WHITE PLAINS — A man extradited from Guatemala admitted in court today that he sexually abused a 9-year-old Bedford girl in a case that created controversy in the Bedford school district in 2006.

Cesar Joel Sagastume Morales, 31, pleaded guilty to first-degree course of sexual contact with a child, a felony, in exchange for an eight-year prison term.

He faced up to 25 years in prison on the charge, which was the top count of the indictment.

Sagastume Morales agreed to serve 10 years of post-release supervision and to be registered as a sex offender.

He will be sentenced July 6 and faces extradition after he is released from state prison.

Prosecutors said Sagastume Morales, the boyfriend of the girl's mother, abused the girl from Sept. 1, 2005, to June 30, 2006. The girl's mother found photos of sexual activity between Sagastume Morales and her daughter on his cell phone, which he left at her house.

Assistant District Attorney Laura Murphy said the girl, now 13, is "thriving" and doing very well in school. She said the girl's family did not want to "set her back" by forcing her to relive the trauma by testifying at a trial.

Bedford police charged Sagastume Morales, a day laborer, in August 2006. He left the country before he could be arrested.

Police said they had a good idea where he was since early on in the case, but were hampered by the fact he was in Guatemala. But they continued working with the FBI, the U.S. State Department and the District Attorney's Office on the extradition, one of only a few granted outside of drug trafficking cases.

"We're extremely grateful to everybody who helped," said Bedford police Detective Larry Haynes, who was in court for the guilty plea. "Without it, we never would have got him back."

Sagastume Morales had been facing a 28-count indictment that included charges of first-degree sexual abuse, use of a child in a sexual performance, and promoting and possessing an obscene sexual performance by a child, all felonies.

The case led to the discharge of Bedford Hills Elementary School Principal Victoria Graboski in 2006 and the filing of criminal charges against her, accusing her of not reporting the abuse.

The girl's mother claimed in a 2007 civil lawsuit that school officials knew about the sexual abuse in December 2005 but failed to properly notify authorities.

The girl had told other students she had sex with an adult and those girls were overheard discussing it at a slumber party the next day, prosecutors in the criminal case against Graboski said.

A parent of one of the girls is said to have told Graboski about the allegations.

At another point, the girl's mother went to the school to ask whether her daughter's behavior had

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changed at school because she was "acting sad at home," prosecutors said.

Misdemeanor charges against Graboski were dismissed and she was later rehired by the district as a special-education teacher. She also agreed to take part in a public-education campaign about reporting suspected abuse.

The mother's civil lawsuit against the school district remains active.

County Judge Susan Cacace issued a protective order barring Sagastume Morales from contacting the girl or her mother.



Cesar Joel  
Sagastume  
Morales

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