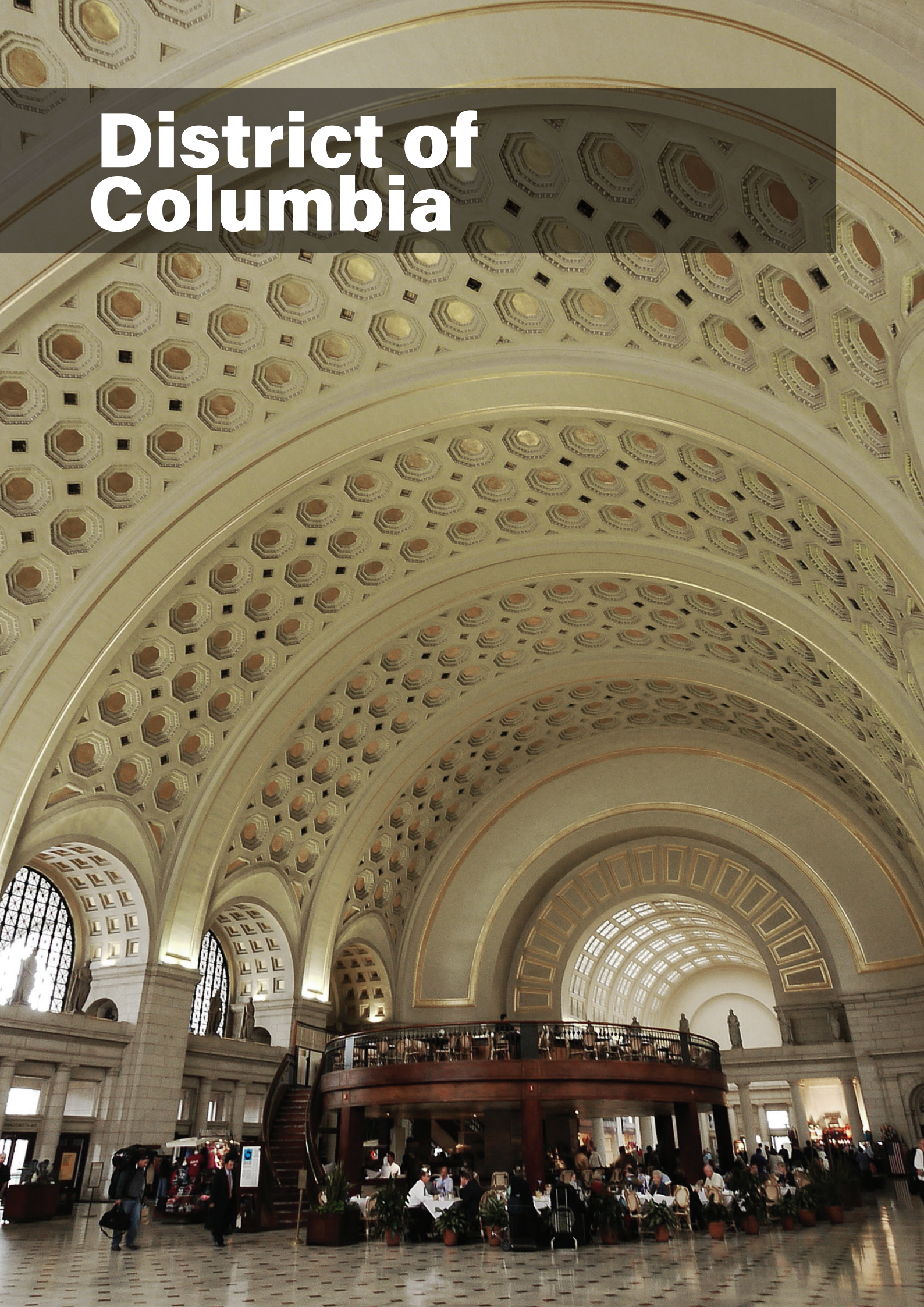


# District of Columbia





## QUICK FACTS ON GÜLEN CHARTER SCHOOLS

# DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



NUMBER OF SCHOOLS

1

KNOWN AS

**Harmony School of Excellence**

TOTAL ENROLLMENT

**105**

CHARTER VENDOR

**Harmony Public Schools**

TOTAL REVENUES

**\$2,089,693**

RELATED INSTITUTIONS



### KEY PEOPLE



Soner Tarim



A.H. Sharif Salim

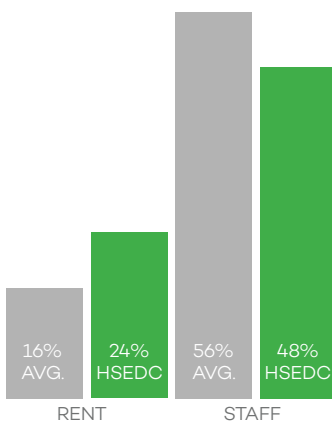


Julie Norton

### FINANCIAL ISSUES

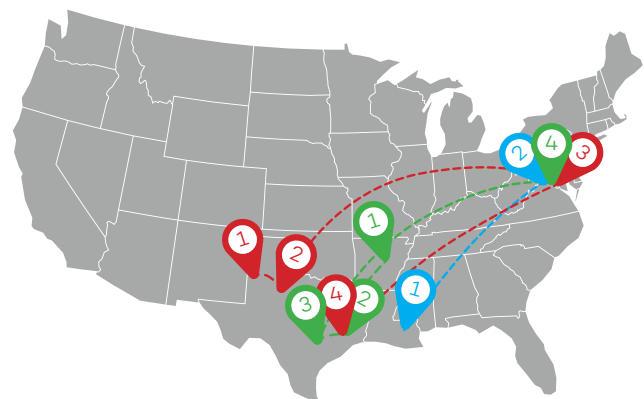
HSEDC has **high overhead costs based on DC charter school averages** and paid 24% of revenue in occupancy costs and just 48% in staff expenses. In comparison, other DC charter schools paid 16% of revenue for occupancy costs and 56% for staff expenses.

HSEDC EXPENSES VS. DC AREA AVERAGE



### GÜLEN ORGANIZATION'S REVOLVING DOOR

Despite repeated denials of any link between or among the Gülen schools, there are clear links shown by the reshuffling of staff, including to Harmony DC.



**EMIN CAVUSOGLU**  
CEO & PRINCIPAL  
HARMONY DC

**FATIH ONER**  
FORMER PRINCIPAL  
HARMONY DC

**NIYAZI EVREN CULHA**  
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL  
HARMONY DC

All figures based on available data for 2015-2016 academic year.

## Quick Facts

- ▶ Region: Greater Texas
- ▶ School Names (known as): Harmony School of Excellence
- ▶ Total number of schools in District: 1
- ▶ Total student enrollment 2015-16: 105<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ Charter Holder/Governing Board(s):
  - ▷ Harmony DC Public Charter Schools<sup>2</sup>
  - ▷ Operating as a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization
- ▶ Charter Management Services Vendor: Harmony Public Schools (also known as the Cosmos Foundation)<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ Regional Gülen Organization Oversight Entity: Harmony Public Schools
- ▶ Regional Sister Networks: Harmony Public Schools (TX); Riverwalk Education Foundation (TX); Little Scholars of Arkansas/LISA Academy (AR); Dove (OK); (formerly Sky Foundation); Pelican Educational Foundation (LA); Millennium Education Foundation/Frontier Schools (MO); Read Foundation/ Memphis School of Excellence (TN); Albuquerque School of Excellence (NM) (formerly Focus Foundation)
- ▶ Total Revenues for FY 2016: \$2,089,693<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ Network Founders:
  - ▷ Soner Tarim: Founder, Harmony DC (D.C.); CEO, Harmony Public Schools (Texas); Lead Presenter at charter presentation for Albuquerque School of Excellence in 2009.<sup>5</sup>
  - ▷ A.H. Sharif Salim: Founder, Harmony DC (D.C.); Assistant Principal and Principal of multiple D.C. area schools. In 2010, he was removed from his position as Oxon Hill Middle School principal when his son, employed as a school aide, attacked a student with mental disabilities.<sup>6</sup>
  - ▷ Julie Norton: Founder of Harmony DC (D.C.); Associate Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations, University of Houston Downtown (TX); substitute teacher, classroom teacher, Director of Communications, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Director of Community Outreach, Harmony Public Schools (TX).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Information taken from: Harmony Public Schools 2016 School Quality Report, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9vq4e56> (last checked 7/13/2017).

<sup>2</sup> Information taken from: Harmony DC IRS 990 form, available at <https://tinyurl.com/y9aw9f5f> (last checked 5/30/2017).

<sup>3</sup> Until 2012, the Cosmos Foundation was the operating organization doing business as Harmony Public Schools. In 2012, Harmony became the primary operating organization.

<sup>4</sup> Information taken from: Harmony DC PCS 2015-2016 Annual Report, available at <https://tinyurl.com/y9ey8fgw> (last checked 5/30/2017).

<sup>5</sup> Information taken from: Harmony School of Excellence DC 2013 charter application, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yab5l5nk> (last checked 7/13/2017); Presentation by Soner Tarim to the New Mexico Public Education Commission on August 26, 2009, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y8yy7vd2> (last checked 7/13/2017).

<sup>6</sup> Information taken from: *Oxon Hill Middle School Principal Removed over assault allegations* (20 April 2010), available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yc9rwbem> (last checked 7/13/2017).

<sup>7</sup> Information taken from: LinkedIn profile, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yb9ptzy2> (last checked 7/13/2017).

## Overview

The Harmony School of Excellence DC ("HSEDC") opened in 2014 under Harmony DC Public Schools ("Harmony DC"), a District of Columbia organization created by Harmony Public Schools ("Harmony") in Texas. Harmony is the sole member of Harmony DC with voting rights.<sup>8</sup> Two Harmony employees, including CEO

Soner Tarim, served on the original three-person board for Harmony DC.<sup>9</sup> Harmony serves as the regional oversight entity and charter management services vendor for Gülen schools in the Greater Texas region and provides management and administrative services to HSEDC.

| School   | Operation                                | Student Demographic Information <sup>10</sup> *  | Authorizer                     | Governing Board                   |
|--|--|--|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Harmony School of Excellence - DC<br>62 T St. NE<br>Washington, DC.<br>20002 | Grades K-5<br>2014-present <sup>11</sup> | Enrollment: 105<br>2% ELL<br>80% FRL<br>12% SWD<br>93.9% African American<br>4.5% Hispanic<br>1.5% Asian | DC Public Charter School Board | Harmony DC Public Charter Schools |

\* ELL indicates English language learners; FRL indicates students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch; SWD indicate students with disabilities

## A History of Strategic Ambiguity and Conflicting Interests

Harmony DC, HSEDC's parent organization, pays Harmony to provide a range of administrative and academic services as HSEDC's charter management organization. HSEDC pays Harmony through two different contracts. First, the entities entered into a five-year support services agreement that expires in June 2019 and can be annually renewed.<sup>12</sup> Harmony makes

\$80 - \$120 per hour under this agreement. Harmony's services allegedly include consulting, educational technology solutions, data network solutions, efficiency analysis, strategic planning, and leadership and teacher training.<sup>13</sup> In addition to the support services agreement, HSEDC pays Harmony five percent of all the state and local per pupil funds it receives annually in licensing

<sup>8</sup> Information taken from: Harmony DC Public Charter Schools IRS 2014 Form 990, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y9aw9f5f> (last checked 7/13/2017).

<sup>9</sup> Information taken from: Harmony School of Excellence DC 2013 charter application, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yab5l5nk> (last checked 7/23/2017).

<sup>10</sup> Information taken from: Harmony School of Excellence DC PCS 2016 School Quality Report, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y9vq4e56> (last checked 7/13/2017).

<sup>11</sup> Information taken from: Harmony School of Excellence DC PCS 2016 School Quality Report, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9vq4e56> (last checked 7/13/2017).

<sup>12</sup> Information taken from: Harmony School of Excellence DC 2013 charter application, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yab5l5nk> (last checked 7/13/2017); IRS Form 990 2014 for Harmony DC Public Charter Schools, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y9aw9f5f> (last checked 7/13/2017).

<sup>13</sup> Information taken from: Harmony Public Schools 2014 Official Statement Pg. B-3, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/ybjjsjd> (last checked 7/13/2017).

fees for use of Harmony's trademarks and intellectual property.<sup>14</sup> In 2016, HSEDC received \$1,838,018 in state and local revenue; this would equate to a payment to Harmony of \$91,900 for licensing fees.<sup>15</sup>

Since Harmony plays a central role in selecting board members and governing Harmony DC, the relationship raises questions about whether Harmony DC's decision to employ Harmony was independent and competitive. In particular, Soner Tarim serves as the President of the HSEDC board and as the CEO of Harmony. Both he and another Harmony-affiliated board member served both the vendor, Harmony, and

the customer, Harmony DC, in the decision to employ Harmony.

Harmony has similar support services agreements in place with seven other Gülen-affiliated charter school networks in its region.<sup>16</sup> The original agreements were based on a percent of all state funds received but changed to an hourly rate structure in 2013. These affiliated charter networks also pay between \$15,000 - \$147,000 in licensing fees per school per year for intellectual property.<sup>17</sup> These arrangements should be scrutinized for signs of financial abuse since there is often little oversight over the services delivered by Harmony.

## Financial Abuse

HSEDC's financial reports and low enrollment raise questions about the school's overall financial sustainability. HSEDC ended the school year with a deficit of \$31,664, one of only eight charter schools out of 58 that ended the year with a negative balance.<sup>18</sup> The school had cash on hand to cover only 14 days of operation, compared to a D.C. average of 120 days' cash on hand.<sup>19</sup> HSEDC also owes Harmony \$32,209 under their agreement.<sup>20</sup>

HSEDC opened with only 66 students in

2014,<sup>21</sup> and it enrolled 105 students in 2015-2016. Due to its low enrollment, HSEDC has high expenses measured on a per pupil basis. For example, HSEDC paid \$453,993 in occupancy costs in 2015, 24 percent of its revenue<sup>22</sup> and over \$6,000 per pupil.<sup>23</sup> In comparison, the other charter schools in Washington paid, on average, just sixteen percent of revenue for occupancy costs. The high overhead decreases funds available to pay teachers: HSEDC paid only 48 percent of its revenue in personnel costs, compared to the D.C. average of 56 percent.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Information taken from: Harmony DC PCS 2015-2016 Annual Report, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9ey8fgw> (last checked 7/14/2017). In addition, a total of \$33,175 was recognized as donated license fee related to the five-year License Agreement with Harmony.

<sup>16</sup> Information taken from: Cosmos Foundation 2011 Official Statement – Appendix B, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y79hpqya>; Cosmos Foundation 2012 Official Statement – Appendix B, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/ybmqrkz2s>; Harmony Public Schools 2014 Official Statement – Appendix B, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/ybjjsjd> (last checked 7/13/2017).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Information taken from: DC Public Charter School Board 2015 Financial Audit Review, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yaopm3qh> (last checked 7/14/2017).

<sup>19</sup> Information taken from: DC Public Charter School Board 2015 Financial Audit Review, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yaopm3qh> (last checked 7/14/2017).

<sup>20</sup> Information taken from: Harmony DC PCS FY2015 Financial Report Card, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yavckhlg> (last checked 7/13/2017).

<sup>21</sup> Information taken from: Harmony DC PCS 2014-2015 Annual Report, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y8vp2nnf> (last checked 7/14/2017).

<sup>22</sup> Information taken from: DC Public Charter School Board 2015 Financial Audit Review, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yaopm3qh> (last checked 7/14/2017).

<sup>23</sup> Per pupil cost calculated from 2014-2015 enrollment of 66 students divided by occupancy cost of \$453,993.

<sup>24</sup> Information taken from: DC Public Charter School Board 2015 Financial Audit Review, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yaopm3qh>

## Bond Financing

Neither Harmony, Harmony DC, nor Charter School Solutions, Harmony's affiliated real

estate arm, have borrowed money through a bond issue to benefit HSEDC.<sup>25</sup>

## Real Estate

HSEDC currently leases its facilities from the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Washington<sup>26</sup> at an annual cost of \$322,298.<sup>27</sup> But Harmony has stated that it will look for a new location when HSEDC expands since the current facility will be

too small. This situation should be monitored in the event that HSEDC attempts to lease facilities from an affiliated landlord such as Charter School Solutions like many other Gülen charter schools across the nation.

## Excessive Use of H-1B Visa Program

In 2014, HSEDC filed 1 H-1B visa application.<sup>28</sup> But due to its close connection with Harmony and the number of employees that have worked for both Harmony and HSEDC, Harmony's H-1B applications should be analyzed for overlap with HSEDC. Harmony has applied for 2,558 H-1B visas since 2005.<sup>28</sup> Harmony paid \$485,970 to a Houston-based law firm that specializes in immigration.<sup>29</sup>

Although Gülen charter schools commonly state that the H-1B visas are necessary to fill shortages for math and science teachers, applications are submitted for a wide range of positions, including: legal counsel, law clerks, construction engineers, art teachers, educational diagnosticians, budget analysts and

accountants, director of special programs, publication coordinator, assistant principals, principal, finance manager, Physical Education teacher, Turkish Teachers, social studies and social science teachers, English as a second language teachers, account managers, economics teachers, assistant superintendents, English and English grammar teachers, elementary school teachers, cluster superintendents, instructional coordinators, education administrators, human resources advisor, purchasing agents and managers, director of communication, Spanish language teacher, public relations manager, curriculum developer for gifted and talented program, operations research analyst, director of high school programs, small projects director, academic advisors, and internal auditor.<sup>30</sup>

yaopm3qh (last checked 7/14/2017).

<sup>25</sup> Search for bond issues at <https://emma.msrb.org/> (last checked 6/08/2017).

<sup>26</sup> Information on ownership of HSEDC school on T Street via real property search, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yb4ecw9d> (last checked 7/14/2017).

<sup>27</sup> Information taken from: Harmony DC PCS FY2015 Financial Report Card, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yavckhlg> (last checked 7/14/2017).

<sup>28</sup> HSEDC's H-1B application is available at: <http://tinyurl.com/ydexrr86> (Harmony Dc Public Charter Schools) (1); see also the Texas state profile.

<sup>29</sup> Harmony IRS Form 990 (2007, 2009), available at: <http://tinyurl.com/hu9wqcl> (last checked 6/10/2017).

<sup>30</sup> Information taken via company searches for H1-B visas application occupations and positions, available at; available at <https://tinyurl.com/y8muahbt>, <https://tinyurl.com/yb2foulo>, and <https://tinyurl.com/ycwlm2x6> (last checked 7/14/2017).

## Notable Gülenist Vendors

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- Harmony Public Schools: HSEDC contracts with Harmony for a range of management and administrative services

through a support services agreement. It also pays Harmony licensing fees for use of its trademark and intellectual property.

## Scandals, Investigations, & Notable Activities

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Harmony established the original three-person founding board for Harmony DC Public Schools, the parent organization for HSEDC. Two members of the Board were associated with Harmony: Soner Tarim, the CEO, and Julie Norton, Harmony's Director of Communications. The third board member worked as principal of Oxon Hill Middle School. In 2010, he lost his position as principal when his son, employed as a school aide, attacked a student with mental disabilities.<sup>31</sup>

HSEDC is located directly across the street from Langley Elementary School, a recently

renovated public school serving the same grades with a STEM-focused curriculum.<sup>32</sup> Langley was working to attract students from nearby families when HSEDC moved in across the street. HSEDC's decision to locate directly across from such a similar school shows a lack of coordination and planning. Soner Tarim, President of Harmony DC at the time, stated that he did not realize Langley was a STEM school.<sup>33</sup> In addition, the Chancellor of the DC Schools, who first learned of HSEDC on Twitter, claimed that locating a charter school adjacent to an existing school was an inefficient use of taxpayer funds.<sup>34</sup>

## Gülenist Cultural and Business Organizations Active in State

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Washington, D.C., does not have the typical Gülen cultural organizations found in other areas. Instead, events are hosted by national Gülen organizations and tend to target federal elected officials.

Turkic American Alliance (TAA): TAA is an umbrella organization that hosts congressional events and dinners and organizes trips to Turkey for federal elected officials. TAA is located at the same address as the Rumi Forum.<sup>35</sup>

TAA's six regional member organizations include:

- CTAA - Council of Turkic American Associations (New York)
- MAFTAA - Mid Atlantic Federation of Turkic American Associations (D.C.)
- TAFM - Turkic American Federation of Midwest (Chicago)
- TAFS - Turkic American Federation Southwest (Atlanta)
- TCAE - Turquoise Council of Americans and Eurasians (Houston)

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<sup>31</sup> Information taken from: *Oxon Hill Middle School Principal Removed over assault allegations* (20 April 2010), available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yc9rwbem> (last checked 7/13/2017).

<sup>32</sup> Information taken from: Brown, Emma. *New D.C. charter school highlights debate over planning*. Washington Post (5 July 2014), available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y7m7yh9w> (last checked 7/14/2017).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> See website for Turkic American Alliance, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/ybsu2ps3> (last checked 7/14/2017).



- WATC - West American Turkic Council (Los Angeles)

**Rumi Forum:** The Rumi Forum is based in Washington, D.C., and has chapters in Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina, and Virginia. Fethullah Gülen is the Forum's honorary chair, and its website promotes his teachings. The Rumi Forum states that its purpose is to foster interfaith and intercultural dialogue by hosting

events and award dinners, discussions, cultural events, and trips to Turkey, Azerbaijan, and other countries. It shares an address with the Turkic American Alliance.<sup>36</sup> The Rumi Forum is also a member of Alliance for Shared Values, an umbrella organization based in New York openly aligned with Fethullah Gülen with six member organizations active throughout the United States.

## Friend of Gülen Spotlight

**U.S. Representative Sheila Jackson Lee:** Sheila Jackson Lee, a congresswoman from Houston, participated in a trip to Baku, Azerbaijan, in 2013 organized by the Turquoise Council of Americans and Eurasians. The Office of Congressional Ethics investigated the trip after learning that SOCAR, the state-owned oil company of Azerbaijan, secretly paid for the trip.<sup>37</sup> Members of Congress were not aware that SOCAR funded the trip and sought approval for the trip from the House Ethics Committee. In

the year preceding the trip, SOCAR sought an exemption from economic sanctions on Iran for a \$28 billion natural gas pipeline project.<sup>38</sup>

Lee was also one of the top recipients of campaign contributions from individuals connected to Gülen schools and businesses. Harmony's former CFO called Lee a supporter of the Harmony schools and stated she helped Harmony's effort to open a charter school in Washington, D.C.<sup>39</sup>

## Gülen Connections: Individuals Caught in the Gülen Organization Web

It is common for the charter networks within a region to shuffle their Turkish H-1B visa employees from school to school and state to state. The individuals listed below are examples of the overlap of employees among schools, further demonstrating the interconnections and affiliation between the Gülen charter networks and organizations.

- Emin Cavusoglu: CEO/ Principal,

Harmony DC Public Charter Schools (D.C.); Principal/Superintendent, LISA Academy Schools (AR); Area superintendent, Harmony Public Schools (TX); Superintendent, San Antonio School of Science and Technology (TX).<sup>40</sup>

- Fatih Oner: Principal, Harmony DC (D.C.); current Principal, Harmony School of Advancement (TX); Cluster

<sup>36</sup> See website for the Rumi Forum, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yc94e6wz> (last checked 7/14/2017).

<sup>37</sup> Information taken from: Higham, Scott et al., *10 members of Congress took trip secretly funded by foreign government*. Washington Post. 13 May 2015. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yc7lk4la> (last checked 7/14/2017).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> See discussion of support for Gülen organizations: Gray, Rosie and Medina Mora, Nicolas. *Secretive Turkish movement buys U.S. influence*. BuzzFeed. 23 July 2014. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yazgkdf3> (last checked 7/14/2017).

<sup>40</sup> Information taken from: Harmony DC IRS 990 Forms, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9aw9f5f> (last checked 7/14/2017); Little Scholars of Arkansas Board Membership 2007-2011 IRS 990 Forms, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/kcy94qn> (last checked 7/14/2017); LinkedIn Profile, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/m8q9dc5> (last checked 7/14/2017).



Superintendent, Harmony Science Academy Lubbock (TX); Principal, Harmony Science Academy Brownsville and Harmony Science Academy Fort Worth (TX).<sup>41</sup>

► Niyazi Evren Culha; Assistant Principal, Harmony DC (D.C.); Assistant Principal, Kenilworth Science and Technology Charter School (LA).<sup>42</sup>

## Notable Press Coverage and Research Regarding the DC Gülenist Network

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► Brown, Emma. *New D.C. charter school highlights debate over planning*. The Washington Post. 5 July 2014. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yadky36a> (last checked 7/14/2017).

► Brown, Emma. *Harmony charter school seeks to expand to D.C.; business practices raise questions*. The Washington Post.

12 November 2013. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yc2pzvgn> (last checked 7/14/2017).

► Lewis, Tisha. *Complaint filed against charter school system for misuse of funds, discriminatory hiring practices*. Fox 5 D.C. 31 May 2016. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y92rnz6a> (last checked 7/14/2017).

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<sup>41</sup> Information taken from: LinkedIn Profile, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/ybreu9oc> (last checked 7/14/2017).

<sup>42</sup> See Louisiana Department of Education Louisiana Believes website, Teacher Data for Kenilworth Science and Technology Charter School (2011), received from a FOIA Request.

