

Tennessee



QUICK FACTS ON GÜLEN CHARTER SCHOOLS

TENNESSEE



NUMBER OF SCHOOLS

1 (2 campuses)


KNOWN AS

Memphis School of Excellence

TOTAL ENROLLMENT

454

CHARTER VENDOR

Harmony Public Schools

TOTAL REVENUES

\$4,159,192

RELATED INSTITUTIONS



Cosmos Foundation/Harmony Public Schools, Riverwalk Education Foundation



Dove Science



Pelican Educational Foundation/Kenilworth Science



Millennium Education Foundation/Frontier Schools



Harmony D.C.



Albuquerque School of Excellence

KEY PEOPLE



Cem Akkus



Ozgenc Aktas-Kocak



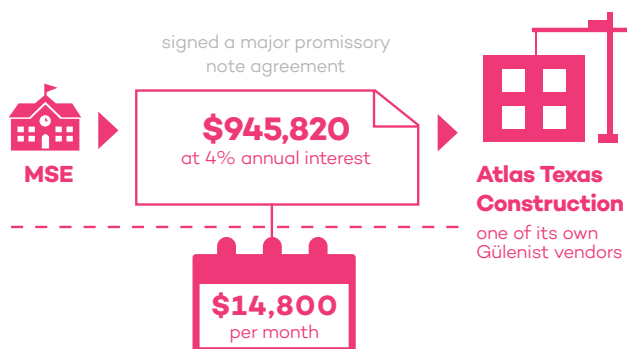
Mutlu Celikok



Emin Kuscü

FINANCIAL ISSUES

Like other charter schools within the Gülen Organization, MSE displays evidence of poor decision-making and inappropriate use of its public funds.



No reason was provided for the loan in MSE's Financial Statement or minutes. MSE chose Atlas Texas Construction (one of its own vendors) as its contractor for a \$803,750 construction project in 2010-2011 at MSE. The acceptance of a long-term loan of almost **\$1 million from a paid vendor incurs an obligation for MSE that raises questions about conflict of interest.**

H-1B VISA APPLICATIONS

21 H-1B

**H-1B VISA APPLICATIONS
2011 to 2016**
\$3,000

Per application

\$63,000

In total

CORRUPTION ALLEGATIONS



So far, **Atlas Texas Construction** has received over **\$12 million** in contracts from Harmony Public Schools. An officer of Atlas Texas Construction was accused of **attempted bribery** of a Louisiana state official in order to influence the outcome of a state investigation of a Gülen school in New Orleans.

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

Quick Facts

- ▶ Region: Greater Texas
- ▶ School Names (known as): Memphis School of Excellence
- ▶ Total number of schools in state: 1 (2 campuses)
- ▶ Total student enrollment 2015-16: 454
- ▶ Charter Holder/Governing Board(s):
 - ▷ Read Foundation
 - Organized as a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization
 - Read Foundation d.b.a. Memphis School of Excellence¹
- ▶ Charter Management Services Vendor: Harmony Public Schools
- ▶ Regional Gülen Organization Oversight Entity: Harmony Public Schools
- ▶ Regional Sister Networks: Cosmos Foundation/Harmony Public Schools (TX); Riverwalk Education Foundation (TX); Harmony D.C. (Washington D.C.); Little Scholars of Arkansas (AR); Dove Science (OK); Pelican Educational Foundation/Kenilworth Science (LA); Millennium Education Foundation/Frontier Schools (MO); Albuquerque School of Excellence (NM)
- ▶ Total Revenues for FY 2016: \$4,159,192²
- ▶ Network Founders:
 - ▷ Cem Akkus: President, Read Foundation (TN); GIS developer at the University of Memphis (TN); B.S. from Karadeniz Teknik University (Turkey).³
 - ▷ Ozgenc Aktas-Kocak: Treasurer, Read Foundation (TN); Trainee Housing and Orientation Coordinator, St. Jude Children's Hospital (TN).⁴
 - ▷ Mutlu Celikok: Vice President, Read Foundation (TN); Director of Corporate Development and Acquisition Integration, FedEx Corporation (TN).⁵
 - ▷ Emin Kuscü: Board Member, Read Foundation (TN); PHP Developer, SmartSource Technical Staffing (TN).⁶

¹ Information taken from Read Foundation IRS Form 990, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/lD6lu3y> (last checked 7/17/2017).

² Information taken from Memphis School of Excellence Financial Statements FY 2016, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y8rz6vmf> (last checked 7/17/2017).

³ Information taken from: Read Foundation Founding Board Membership on IRS 990 Form 2011, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/lD6lu3y> (last checked 7/17/2017); Cem Akkus LinkedIn profile, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/l3ccaod> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁴ Information taken from: Read Foundation Founding Board Membership on Read Foundation IRS 990 Form 2011, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/lD6lu3y> (last checked 7/17/2017); Ozgenc Aktas LinkedIn Profile, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/mlzpmvk> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁵ Information taken from: Read Foundation Founding Board Membership on Read Foundation IRS 990 Form 2011, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/lD6lu3y> (last checked 7/17/2017); Mutlu Celikok LinkedIn Profile, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/kjxqkvb> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁶ Information taken from: Read Foundation Founding Board Membership on IRS 990 Form 2011, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/lD6lu3y> (last checked 7/17/2017); Emin Kuscü LinkedIn Profile, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/lq4wjm3> (last checked 7/17/2017).

Overview

The Memphis School of Excellence (MSE) opened in 2010 operated by the Read Foundation, a Tennessee nonprofit tax-exempt organization d.b.a. MSE. MSE has been tied to Harmony Public Schools and its governing board, the Cosmos Foundation, from MSE's inception. News stories from MSE's first year of operation stated "the Texas-based Cosmos Foundation will open the Memphis School of Excellence."⁷ MSE is an example of Harmony's strategic efforts to expand its model, influence, and funding sources within the Greater Texas region. MSE contracted with Harmony Public Schools starting in at least 2011 to provide a range of administrative and management services. Like the majority of Gülenist-controlled charter schools around the country, a supermajority of MSE's board members is of Turkish national origin. MSE's second school opened in July of 2017 and has several pending applications currently up for consideration and approval.

In addition to MSE's efforts to open new charter schools, several other notable Gülenists have filed unsuccessful applications throughout Tennessee. For example, North Carolina network founder Suzan Merturek has filed an application to open a charter school in Knoxville.⁸ Merturek also serves on the Board of Trustees for Virginia International University, a Gülenist institution run by other Gülenist charter network founders⁹ and is currently employed as the Public Relations Coordinator of the Knoxville Turkish Cultural Center.¹⁰ Additionally, Ismail Fidan has filed at least three charter applications in Nashville. He is the former President of the Society of Universal Dialogue, a Gülenist cultural association,¹¹ and serves as the Academic Director of the Advisory Board and Outreach Coordinator for the Atlantic Institute – Tennessee, a Gülenist cultural association affiliated with the FL Gülenist networks.¹² Fidan is also connected to the Coral Academy of Science, a Gülenist network in Reno, Nevada.¹³

⁷ Roberts, Jane. *New charter leaders savvy, supported – Expansion of eligibility for new schools in Tennessee is an opening for dedicated, experienced organizers*. Commercial Appeal. 6 March 2010. Available in the archives of Commercial Appeal here <http://tinyurl.com/y9ggtnv3> (last checked 6/09/2017) or alternately hosted here: <http://tinyurl.com/yacx7ngr> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁸ Board member biography information taken from Triad Math and Science Academy Charter School application received from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, response in email 5/12/2017 in response to 2017 FOIA request.

⁹ Board member biography information taken from Triad Math and Science Academy Charter School application received from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, response in email 5/12/2017 in response to 2017 FOIA request.

¹⁰ Information taken from: Constantine, Mary. *Dishing with Suzan Merturek*. Knox News. 16 September 2010. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/mku6zm9> (last checked 7/17/2017).

¹¹ Board membership information taken from: Society of Universal Dialogue IRS 990 Form 2011, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yajw86qq> (last checked 7/17/2017).

¹² Information taken from Atlantic Institute website, available at <https://tinyurl.com/ybsjmkwr> (last checked 7/17/2017).

¹³ Information taken from 2005 research study authored by Ismail Fidan and others involving students at Coral Academy of Science in Reno, Nevada titled *Teaching Basic Engineering Concepts in a K-12 Environment Using LEGO® Bricks and Robotics*, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y8u8zcmr> (last checked 7/17/2017).

School	Operation	Student Demographic Information ^{14*}	Authorizer	Governing Board
Memphis School of Excellence 4450 S. Mendenhall Rd, Memphis, TN 38141	Grades 6-12 ¹⁵ 2010-present ¹⁶	Enrollment: 454 50.9% FRL 3.3% SWD 6.6% ELL 76.7% African American 21.1% Hispanic 1.3% Asian <1.0% White	Shelby County Schools ¹⁷	Read Foundation ¹⁸
Memphis School of Excellence 4921 Winchester Road, Memphis, TN	Grades 9-12 2017-present ¹⁹	N/A	Shelby County Schools	Read Foundation
Pending Charter School Applications				
<i>Memphis School of Excellence North (3 additional schools if approved)</i>	<i>Grades K-12 Vote to approve or deny antici- pated August 2017²⁰</i>		<i>Shelby County Schools</i>	<i>Read Foundation</i>
Closed/Abandoned Schools				
None				
Charter Petition Denials				
<i>Knoxville Charter Academy²¹</i>	<i>2011-2012²²</i>		<i>Knox County Board of Education²³</i>	<i>Charter Company: Iris Education Foundation²⁴ Petitioners: Suzan Mertyurek, Leyla Achilova</i>

¹⁴ School operation and student demographic data taken from Tennessee School State Report Card for school year 2015-2016, available at <https://tinyurl.com/ko96pkn> (last checked 7/17/2017).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Information regarding Memphis School of Excellence first year of operation taken from Shelby County Charter Schools 2017 annual report, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/mt5ct5p> (last checked 7/17/2017)

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Memphis School of Excellence governing board information taken from Memphis School of Excellence website, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9gvmsn> (last checked 7/17/2017).

¹⁹ Information taken from: Winchester Road ownership via Shelby County Register of Deeds, available at <http://tinyurl.com/y8qvfhdh> (last checked 6/7/2017); telephone conversation with MSE to confirm opening date. See Nichols, Meagan. *Construction: \$2m build-out for Memphis charter school*. Memphis Business Journal. 6 September 2016. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y8r7otlb> (last checked 7/17/2017).

²⁰ Information taken from article on new charter applications in Memphis: Kebede, Laura Faith. *Here's who wants to open charter schools in Memphis in 2018*. Chalkbeat. 24 April 2017. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yb3auxoh> (last checked 7/17/2017).

²¹ Information taken from Knoxville Charter Academy 2010 initial application, available at <https://tinyurl.com/m8zwttl> (last checked 7/17/2017).

²² Information regarding Knoxville Charter Academy appeal of application denial by the Knox County Board of Education to the Tennessee State Board of Education taken from affirmation of county board denial by State Board, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/llgqo7c> (last checked 7/17/2017).

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Information taken from Knoxville Charter Academy initial application, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/m8zwttl> (last checked 7/17/2017).

School	Operation	Student Demographic Information ^{14*}	Authorizer	Governing Board
Nashville Academy of Science and Technology	2007-2008 ²⁵		Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools Board of Education ²⁶	Petitioner: Ismail Fidan
Nashville Charter Middle School	2007 ²⁷		Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools Board of Education ²⁸	Petitioner: Ismail Fidan
Nolensville Academy for Math and Science ²⁹	2013 ³⁰		Metropolitan Board of Public Education, Davidson County, Nashville ³¹	Petitioner: Ismail Fidan, Mohammed Kokoy ³²
Private Schools				
None				

*ELL – English Language Learner; FRL – students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch (economically disadvantages); SWD – Student with disabilities (special education)

A History of Strategic Ambiguity and Conflicting Interests

The Tennessee network began in 2006 with the founding of the first Gülenist cultural associations that would later pave the way for Gülenist charter applications to be approved. The Read Foundation, the non-profit governing board overseeing the MSE chain, was incorporated later in the fall of 2009. The Read Foundation's first school, MSE, opened in Memphis, Tennessee in 2010 under the oversight and direction of Harmony Public Schools, the regional oversight

entity for the Greater Texas region of the Gülen Organization. MSE's second school opened in July of 2017, and while this growth seems slower and later than in other states within the Gülen Organization, the amount of attempted but denied charter petitions throughout other cities in Tennessee indicates the Gülen Organization's deep interest in expanding throughout Tennessee. With two schools in operation at the time of this report's publication, and an additional three up

²⁵ Information regarding Nashville Academy of Science and Technology denial taken from Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools Board of Education 11/13/2007 Amended Board Minutes, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/ku7eo8o> (last checked 7/17/2017).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Information regarding Nashville Charter Middle denial taken from Tennessee State Board of Education Charter School Appeal Decision History in which the State Board affirmed the denial, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/lwfhqb5> (last checked 7/17/2017).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Information taken from Nolensville Academy Letter of Intent submitted 1/13/2013, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/l99ojfu> (last checked 7/17/2017).

³⁰ Information regarding Nolensville's absence from list of approved charters taken from: Zelinski, Andrea. *MNPS recommends four new charters for school board approval*. Nashville City Paper. 14 June 2014. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/lvqq6hx> (last checked 7/17/2017).

³¹ Information taken from Nolensville Academy Letter of Intent submitted 1/13/2013, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/l99ojfu> (last checked 7/17/2017).

³² *Ibid.*

for approval in August of 2017, the Tennessee network is poised to expand significantly in the next two years.

As a newer state network, we believe that MSE depends on its regional hub and oversight entity Harmony Public Schools based in Texas to serve as its external educational management organization. Like other state networks within the Greater Texas region, MSE pays Harmony to provide a range of administrative and academic services through a long-term, on-going support services agreement that is annually renewed. The services allegedly provided by Harmony include: school start-up services; facility management; financial consulting; professional leadership; technology and database support; student admissions; marketing and employee recruiting; curriculum and assessment; student development and school climate; cooperation with home-school, external organizations, and science fair organizations; and academic and non-academic performance.³³ Notably, many of these included services

relate to what our research instructs us are the Gülen Organization's primary aims—employee recruiting through the H-1B program, facility management through use of Gülenist real estate companies, technology and database support through use of Gülenist vendors, cooperation with science fair organizations through forced involvement with Gülenist-controlled science fairs which serve as profit centers and student award mills that bolster the participating schools' reputations for winning in essentially fake competitions. For these services, MSE initially paid Harmony 3% of all its annual state revenues.³⁴ Harmony then changed its billing structure and now bills MSE at the rate of \$80 - \$120 per hour, which we believe makes it easier to upcharge MSE and exploit MSE's funds as Harmony needs by potentially manipulating work hours. In addition, Harmony charges a licensing fee for its intellectual property software, with wide-ranging amounts from \$15,000 - \$147,000 per school each year.³⁵ These agreements appear to be ongoing, with the last known renewal ending in 2016.³⁶

Financial Issues

Like other charter schools within the Gülen Organization, MSE displays evidence of poor decision-making and inappropriate use of its public funds. For example, MSE signed a major promissory note agreement with Atlas Texas Construction, one of its own Gülenist vendors, on July 11, 2011 for a \$945,820 loan at 4 percent annual interest. Payments of \$14,800 per month were due to Atlas beginning February 1,

2012, with maturation set for December 2017.³⁷ No reason was provided for the loan in MSE's Financial Statement or minutes. The balance on the loan was \$265,287 as of June 30, 2016.³⁸ MSE chose Atlas Texas Construction as its contractor for a \$803,750 construction project in 2010-2011 at MSE's 4450 S. Mendenhall Road location.³⁹ The acceptance of a long-term loan of almost \$1 million from a paid vendor incurs an obligation

³³ See Cosmos Foundation bond issue May 1, 2011 Official Statement - Support Services Agreement on p. B-2 & 3, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yay4nstx> (last checked 7/17/2017).

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ See Harmony bond issue July 2, 2014 Official Statement Pg. B-3, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/ybjjsjd> (last checked 7/17/2017).

³⁶ See Memphis School of Excellence Financial Statements FY 2016, p. 22, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y8rz6vmf> (last checked 7/17/2017).

³⁷ Information taken from Memphis School of Excellence Financial Statements FY 2011, p. 24, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9x5v6jp> (last checked 7/17/2017).

³⁸ Information taken from Memphis School of Excellence Financial Statements FY 2016, p. 22, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y8rz6vmf> (last checked 7/17/2017).

³⁹ Information regarding Total Contract valuation and Contractor: Phoenix Building Group taken from 7/21/2010 attachment on the Application for Building Permit #B1028459 for 4450 S. Mendenhall Road retrieved via Memphis and Shelby County Office of Construction Code Enforcement search, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y8v3zys6> (last checked 7/17/2017).

for MSE that raises questions about conflict of interest and whether the selection of Atlas as a contractor/vendor was through an open and competitive process, or like most Gülenist vendors chosen by Gülenist charter schools, a matter of apparent insider dealing.

As another example of financial misuse, the MSE Board approved using its limited public school funds to support a moving expense reimbursement policy for its employees on January 30, 2016.⁴⁰ While this kind of policy is practically unheard of in public education and the charter

school field, it is a known practice of the Gülen Organization and is even referenced in the *tuzuk*, or contract, that Gülenist H-1B employees agree to in order to be placed in a Gülenist charter school in the United States.⁴¹ Because Gülen charter schools recruit teachers from Turkey and continually move Turkish staff from school to school across state lines, the cost to reimburse staff for moving expenses is likely substantial, not appropriate for public funds, and we believe just another way the Gülen Organization misuses public tax dollars to fund its own agenda.

Bond Financing

Neither the Read Foundation nor MSE have borrowed funds through a bond issue. To date, Charter School Solutions, the real estate arm of Harmony Public Schools, has not borrowed money through a bond for MSE, though this network should be watched in case the three new campuses are approved as a bond may be imminent to support new buildings.

For Harmony Public Schools and other networks within the Greater Texas region, Harmony's private external real estate arm Charter School Solutions (CSS) typically applies for facilities bonds to purchase property and construct and/or renovate schools and then rent back those properties at an excessive cost for the apparent benefit of the Gülen Organization. Under

its arrangement with Harmony, CSS owns these bond-financed properties and become the landlord for the schools, leasing the facilities back to the schools and charging inflated rents that are more than what is owed on the bonds. We believe that CSS uses the excess rental payments to fund its own operations and programs and expand the Harmony model to other states. CSS issued a \$44 million bond for Harmony Public Schools in April 2016 and an \$8 million bond for the Albuquerque School of Excellence in June 2016. CSS is charging these two affiliated charter networks \$750,000 per year more than the debt on the bond, a total of \$22.5 million over the life of the bond that we believe benefits the Gülen Organization directly at the public's expense.

Real Estate

So far, MSE has not rented or purchased any property from a Gülenist real estate company. As the TN network is still very new, this will likely change as MSE gets approval for additional schools and campuses throughout the state. MSE currently rents its facility at 4450 S.

Mendenhall Road (Memphis) from an unaffiliated entity, RREEF America Reit II Corporation.⁴² MSE purchased property on 4921 Winchester Road in April 2016 for \$950,000 from an unaffiliated party and filed a \$2 million building permit to update the multi-building facility for a new high school

⁴⁰ Information taken from MSE Board minutes, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yddn3xnk> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁴¹ See Tuzuk agreement, Appendix I

⁴² Information taken from RREEF America Reit II Corp Bloomberg Company overview, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y94ejye2> (last checked 7/17/2017).

campus opened in July 2017, however the company doing the construction work, Ybos & Sons, does not appear to be affiliated with the Gülen Organization.⁴³

MSE did hire one of Harmony's preferred vendors for the Greater Texas region, Atlas Texas Construction and Trading, to serve as the contractor for an \$803,750 construction project at the 4450 S. Mendenhall Road school site in 2010.⁴⁴ In July 2011, Atlas Texas Construction then extended a \$945,820 loan to MSE with monthly payments of \$14,800 and a maturation date of December 2017.⁴⁵ The reason for the loan is not specified in

MSE's Financial Statement. The acceptance of a long-term loan of almost \$1 million from a paid vendor incurs an obligation for MSE that raises questions about conflict of interest whether the selection of a contractor/vendor has been an open and competitive process. So far, Atlas Texas Construction has received over \$12 million in contracts from Harmony Public Schools.⁴⁶ Notably, the same officer of Atlas Texas Construction who is referenced in the MSE construction project letter was accused of attempted bribery of a Louisiana state official in order to influence the outcome of a state investigation of a Gülen school in New Orleans.⁴⁷

Excessive Use of H1-B Visa Program

Like other Gülen organization charter networks, the Read Foundation and the MSE utilize the H-1B visa program to immigrate large numbers of individuals from Turkey who are affiliated with Gülen into the United States for employment in the schools. From 2011 to 2016, Read and the MSE filed a total of 6 H-1B visa applications.⁴⁸ The cost of these applications is estimated to be \$3,000 per application, with a total of \$63,000 spent in public funds so far.

While Gülenist administrators state that the

visas are necessary to fill shortages for math and science teachers, positions are actually filled for a wide range of positions, including: Turkish teachers, principals, assistant principals, budget analysts, instructional coordinators, and foreign language teachers.⁴⁹

Read and MSE use the same immigration attorneys to file and process their H-1B visa applications as other known Gülen Organizations charter networks, vendors, and cultural associations, indicating once again the existence of an

⁴³ Information regarding purchase of new MSE facility taken from: Nichols, Meagan. *Construction: \$2 million build-out for Memphis charter school*. Memphis Business Journal. 6 September 2016. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y8r7otlb> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁴⁴ The following information regarding Atlas contract with MSE for 2010 renovation at 4450 S. Mendenhall Road was retrieved via Memphis and Shelby County Office of Construction Code Enforcement search, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y8v3zys6> (last checked 7/17/2017). See first document: Letter to Inci Akpınar (Atlas Texas Construction & Trading Inc) from Marcus Denton (lead architect on the MSE project) re: building specifications, 8/30/2010 attachment on the Application for Mechanical Permit 4450 Mendenhall Road. See second document: Stop Work order issued to Atlas Texas Construction for installing DOA units without permit from the Memphis and Shelby County Office of Construction Code Enforcement 12/21/2010. See third document: Application completed by "Owner/customer" – Atlas Texas Construction, for Mechanical Permit issued to Security Fire Protection 8/11/ 2010. See fourth document: Total Contract valuation, Contractor: Phoenix Building Group 7/21/2010 attachment on the Application for Building Permit 4450 S. Mendenhall Road.

⁴⁵ Information taken from Memphis School of Excellence Financial Statements FY 2011, p. 24, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9x5v6jp> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁴⁶ See independent contractors with contracts \$100k and over, IRS Form 990 for Harmony 2007, 2008, 2010, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/hu9wqcl> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁴⁷ Information taken from: Vanacore, Andrew. *Abramson charter group's ties to Gülen movement come to surface*. New Orleans Time-Picayune. 22 July 2017. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/3l2cnxs> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁴⁸ The Tennessee charter schools' H-1B applications from 2001-2016 are available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yad7veos> (Memphis School of Excellence) (3); <http://tinyurl.com/yb45hzau> (Read Foundation) (3) (last checked 7/16/2017).

⁴⁹ Information regarding positions listed on H1-B visa applications available at: <https://tinyurl.com/m4qoxkv> (last checked 7/17/2017).

overall network.

- ▶ **Leonard D'Arrigo:** the Tennessee network used D'Arrigo, an Albany, NY-based attorney, to file numerous H-1B applications. D'Arrigo also filed applications for other Gülenist entities, including:⁵⁰
 - ▷ Cosmos Foundation (TX)
 - ▷ Little Scholars of Arkansas (AR)
 - ▷ Raindrop Foundation
 - ▷ Central Jersey College Prep Charter School (NJ)
 - ▷ Syracuse Academy of Science Charter School (NY)
 - ▷ Millennium Education Foundation/Frontier Schools (MO)
 - ▷ Rochester Academy Charter School (NY)
 - ▷ Dove/Sky Foundation (OK)
 - ▷ Bergen Arts and Science Charter School (NY)
 - ▷ Albuquerque School of Excellence (NM)
 - ▷ Truebright Science Academy Charter School
- ▶ **Garrett White:** the Tennessee network used White, a Houston, TX-based attorney, to file numerous H-1B applications. White also filed applications for other Gülenist entities, including:⁵¹
 - ▷ Cosmos Foundation (TX)
 - ▷ Dove Science Academy (OK)
 - ▷ Riverwalk Education Foundation (TX)
 - ▷ Pelican Educational Foundation (LA)
 - ▷ Little Scholars of Arkansas (AR)
 - ▷ Raindrop Foundation (TX and Greater Texas region)
 - ▷ Dove/Sky Foundation (OK)
 - ▷ Millennium Education Foundation/Frontier Schools (MO)
 - ▷ Texas Gulf Foundation (TX)
 - ▷ Helix Design and Production
 - ▷ Solidarity Contracting (TX)
 - ▷ Brighten Technologies (TX)
 - ▷ Target Design and Management (TX)
 - ▷ Institute of Interfaith Dialog for World Peace
 - ▷ Nur International

Notable Turkish Vendors

Atlas Texas Construction: Atlas Texas Construction and Trading was hired by MSE to serve as the contractor for an \$803,750 construction project at the 4450 S. Mendenhall Road school site in 2010 as evidenced by numerous documents that reference Atlas Texas Construction.⁵² In February 2012, despite its status with MSE as a paid vendor, Atlas Texas Construction extended a \$945,820 loan to MSE

with monthly payments of \$14,800 and a maturation date of December 2017. The reason for the loan is not specified in the Financial Statement. Atlas is a known vendor used by Harmony Public Schools and throughout the Greater Texas region. Of particular note, the same individual listed on the MSE construction application was accused of bribing a state official in Louisiana in reference to that official's investigation of the

⁵⁰ Information regarding Leonard D'Arrigo H1-B visas filed available at: <https://tinyurl.com/kcb3kjq> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁵¹ Information regarding Garrett White H1-B visas filed available at: <https://tinyurl.com/lg5f2aq> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁵² The following information regarding Atlas contract with MSE for 2010 renovation at 4450 S. Mendenhall Road was retrieved via Memphis and Shelby County Office of Construction Code Enforcement search, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y8v3zys6> (last checked 7/17/2017). See first document: Letter to Inci Akpinar (Atlas Texas Construction & Trading Inc) from Marcus Denton (lead architect on the MSE project) re: building specifications, 8/30/2010 attachment on the Application for Mechanical Permit 4450 Mendenhall Road. See second document: Stop Work order issued to Atlas Texas Construction for installing DOA units without permit from the Memphis and Shelby County Office of Construction Code Enforcement 12/21/2010. See third document: Application completed by "Owner/customer" – Atlas Texas Construction, for Mechanical Permit issued to Security Fire Protection 8/11/ 2010. See fourth document: Total Contract valuation, Contractor: Phoenix Building Group 7/21/2010 attachment on the Application for Building Permit 4450 S. Mendenhall Road.

Gülenist charter network there.⁵³

Harmony Public Schools: MSE has contracted with Harmony through a support services agreement to provide a range of management and administrative services to the school for a fee. In addition, Harmony now charges a licensing fee for its intellectual property software charging \$15,000 - \$147,000 per school per year.⁵⁴ As of 2013, the Memphis School of Excellence renewed its contracts with Harmony Public Schools for its management services.⁵⁵

Winport Group LLC: The MSE Board voted to approve a \$7,205 contract with the Winport Group LLC for purchase of lockers and teacher desks at its October 31, 2015 meeting.⁵⁶ The Winport Group LLC, formerly Aurora Handyman or Aurora International, is a Texas company that operates under eight assumed names.⁵⁷ It had a \$4.5 million contract with Harmony Public Schools⁵⁸ and is currently owned by Ahmet Duran who is affiliated with the American Turkish Business Council and the Raindrop Foundation.⁵⁹

Scandals, Investigations, & Notable Activities

Dr. Willie Herenton, a former Mayor of Memphis and school superintendent, filed charter applications to open the W.E.B. DuBois Consortium of 9 charter schools in Memphis stating that Harmony Public Schools, the Gülen -affiliated charter network in Texas, would provide start-up assistance and ongoing school operations.⁶⁰ When questioned about the relationship with Harmony by a County Commissioner who questioned Harmony's association with Fethullah Gülen, Herenton stated that there was no actual alliance with Harmony and that he had referenced the partnership in his application only to impress a

state official from Texas. Harmony also denied any connection with the W.E.B. DuBois schools. In the end, the W.E.B. DuBois charter application was denied by the Shelby County Schools, but remanded back to the district for approval by the State Board of Education⁶¹ and later approved by the district.⁶² There is no known involvement between the two entities at this time, but bizarrely it remains the most scandalous attention the Gülen Organization has received in Tennessee despite the fact that Gülenist charter schools with actual affiliations to Harmony have been opened since.

⁵³ Information taken from: Vanacore, Andrew. *Abramson charter group's ties to Gülen movement come to surface*. New Orleans Time-Picayune. 22 July 2017. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/3l2cnxs> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁵⁴ See Harmony bond issue 7/02/2014 Official Statement Pg. B-3, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/ybjzsjd> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁵⁵ Information taken from Memphis School of Excellence Financial Statements FY 2016, p. 22, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y8rz6vmf> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁵⁶ MSE Board minutes from 10.31.15; available from <https://www.sememphis.org/Admission/2015-10-31%20Agenda%20and%20Minutes%20Read%20Foundation.pdf> (last checked 6.8.17).

⁵⁷ Texas Secretary of State SOSDirect to find business entities; available from <https://direct.sos.state.tx.us/acct/acct-login.asp> (last checked 2016).

⁵⁸ See IRS Form 990 -2011 for Harmony available from <https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/organizations/760615245> (last checked 2016).

⁵⁹ Corporate documents for American Turkic Business Council (2015) and Rain Drop Foundation (2.17.16) available from Texas Secretary of State, available at <http://tinyurl.com/mfxbyjr> (last checked 2016).

⁶⁰ Information taken from: Bailey, Clay and Roberts, Jane. *Charter's affiliation under fire*. Commercial Appeal. 12 June 2012. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y7eon5ca> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁶¹ Information regarding decision by the State Board of Education taken from Charter School Appeal Decision History, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/lwfhqb5> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁶² Information regarding WEB DuBois charter approval taken from: Hannah, Faith. *Former Mayor to Break Ground on Charter Schools*. WREG. 17 April 2013. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yc2k6uqv> (last checked 7/17/2017).

Gülenist Cultural and Business Organizations Active in State

Turkish cultural organizations play a central role in the Gülen landscape, serving as the external face to the community that obscures the true activities of the organization. They are generally nonprofit organizations with governing boards often composed largely of individuals of Turkish national origin. The organizations provide a platform for community involvement, hosting events where local leaders are honored, convening forums and conferences, and sponsoring expense-paid trips to Turkey that promote the Gülen Movement. In addition, our research suggests that funds collected through the various Gülen charter school schemes – vendor contracts, excessive rents, and teacher kickbacks – can be channeled through the organizations to pay for programs that will enhance the façade of legitimacy.

Society of Universal Dialogue (SUD):

SUD is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization founded in Nashville, Tennessee in 2006 that hosts intercultural and interfaith events often in collaboration with other community groups to “promote dialogue” across the state.⁶³ It hosts annual dinners that honor local leaders, and it sponsors trips to Turkey for elected officials and community leaders. The Knoxville Turkish Cultural Center is a separate unit that operates under the of SUD organization umbrella. Most recently, the Atlantic Institute - Tennessee was created as a spinoff from SUD that will take over many of its interfaith and education activities. SUD will operate as the Tennessee Istanbul Cultural Center (TNICC) with offices in Knoxville and Nashville and focus primarily on community

services.⁶⁴ Many of SUD’s/TNICC leaders are connected to other Gülen -affiliated organizations in Tennessee such as the Turkish American Chamber of Commerce. (see *Connections* section of this document). An example of a community event hosted by the SUD/TNICC is the annual Dialogue and Friendship dinner in 2010 that presented community service awards to Governor Phil Bredesen, Representative Jim Cooper, and Nashville Mayor Karl Dean.⁶⁵

Tennessee Istanbul Cultural Center (TICC): The Society of Universal Dialogue (SUD) now operates as the Tennessee Istanbul Cultural Center.⁶⁶

Turkish American Chamber of Commerce of the Southeast (TACC) - Tennessee: TACC was created in 2006 to promote trade and investment opportunities between Turkey and the Southeast region of the United States and to further social relationships between the two countries.⁶⁷ Based in Atlanta, it is active in Tennessee, Florida, South Carolina, Alabama, and Georgia and has a branch office in Nashville. Many of TACC’s leaders in Tennessee are connected to other Gülen -affiliated organizations such as the Tennessee Istanbul Cultural Center (see *Connections* section of this document).

Atlantic Institute - Tennessee (Institute - TN): The Atlantic Institute - Tennessee is a spin-off from the Society of Universal Dialogue (SUD) in Tennessee and has offices in Nashville and Knoxville (shares an address with the Tennessee Istanbul Cultural Center in Nashville).⁶⁸ It recently

⁶³ See organization description on TN Istanbul Cultural Center website, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y8rx6ozc> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁶⁴ See About Atlantic Institute Tennessee, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9fm7ths> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁶⁵ See Tennessee Istanbul Cultural Center Fourth Annual Dialogue and Friendship dinner 2010, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yb6elrtj> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁶⁶ See organization description on TN Istanbul Cultural Center website, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y8rx6ozc> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁶⁷ See About the Turkish American Chamber of Commerce of the Southeast, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yb3cmp5h> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁶⁸ See Atlantic Institute Tennessee staff listing, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/ycqar8nl> (last checked 7/17/2017).

took over many of the activities previously sponsored by SUD including awards dinners, forums on various topics, and other community events. It also sponsors trips to Turkey for local elected officials and leaders. The Institute - TN is a member of the Atlantic Institute that has chapters throughout the Southeast United States, including Florida, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee and South Carolina. The Atlantic Institute is a member organization of the Alliance for Shared Values (Alliance), the national umbrella organization for six Gülen groups around the United States that are openly

aligned with the Gülen Movement.⁶⁹ Institute leaders in Tennessee are connected to other Gülen -affiliated organizations in the state such as the Turkish American Chamber of Commerce Southeast. (see *Connections* section of this document). Examples of community events sponsored by the Institute - TN include the 2014 Dialogue and Friendship dinner that presented an award to Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam⁷⁰ and the 2013 dinner that presented awards to Nashville Chief of Police Steve Anderson and Tennessee Supreme Court Justice Sharon Lee.⁷¹

Friends of Gülen Spotlight

Many elected officials participate in expense-paid trips to Turkey and other aligned countries such as Azerbaijan that are organized and paid by Gülen -affiliated organizations such as the Turquoise Council of Americans and Eurasians. At least 11 elected officials from Tennessee participated in the trips to Turkey in recent years, including:

- ▶ Senator Stacey Campfield (2013)⁷²
- ▶ Representative Antonio Parkinson (2013)⁷³
- ▶ Representative Johnnie Turner (2013)⁷⁴

- ▶ Representative Roger Kane (2013)⁷⁵
- ▶ Representative Harry Brooks (2012)⁷⁶ Trip partly paid for by the Azerbaijan national oil company (SOCAR)
- ▶ Representative Joe Armstrong (2012)⁷⁷
- ▶ Senator Brian Kelsey (2013)⁷⁸
- ▶ State Representative Joe Towns (2013)⁷⁹
- ▶ Representative Terri Lynn Weaver (2013)⁸⁰
- ▶ Senator Reginald Tate (2012)⁸¹

⁶⁹ See Alliance for Shared Values on Atlantic Institute website, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/ybsjmkwr> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁷⁰ Information regarding Atlantic institute Tennessee Dialogue and Friendship dinner 2014 available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9vk4hb3> (last checked 6/5/2017).

⁷¹ Information regarding Atlantic institute Tennessee Dialogue and Friendship dinner 2013 available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y956gagy> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁷² Information taken from: Humphrey, Tom. *Campfield, Kane among lawmakers going on trip to Turkey, Azerbaijan; Groups with ties to Muslim leader paying*. Knoxville News Sentinel. 1 May 2013. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/mgjb9a8> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

- ▶ Former Representative Joshua Evans (2012)⁸²
- ▶ Bill Gibbons, State Safety Commissioner (2013)⁸⁴
- ▶ Former Representative Gary Odom (2012)⁸³
- ▶ David Purkey, state Safety Assistant Commissioner (2013)⁸⁵

Gülen Connections: Individuals Caught in the Gülen Organization Web

It is common for the charter networks within a region to shuffle their Turkish H1-B visa employees, both teachers and administrators, among schools, states, and education management vendors in different types of jobs. The individuals listed below are examples of the overlap of employees among these organizations, further demonstrating the interconnections and affiliation between the networks.

- ▶ Ali Gumus: Principal and Board Member, Read Foundation/Memphis School of Excellence (TN); Principal and Superintendent of LISA Academy - Gülen-affiliate (AR).⁸⁶
- ▶ Soner Tarim: CEO, Harmony Public Schools (TX); Director, Turkish American Business Council (TX).⁸⁷
- ▶ Muhammet Turkay: Executive Director, Read Foundation (TN); Principal, Memphis School of Excellence (TN); Director, Sky Foundation (OK); Math Teacher, Dove Science Academy (OK); Student, Industrial Engineering (Istanbul University).⁸⁸
- ▶ Suzan Merturek: Public Relations Coordinator, Knoxville Turkish Center; Lead Applicant, failed Knoxville Charter Academy (TN); Director and Founder, Triad Math and Science Academy (NC); Board of Trustees, Virginia International University - a Gülenist university (VA).⁸⁹
- ▶ Bayram Demirbuga: Director, Read Foundation (TN); President, Society of Universal Dialogue (TN).⁹⁰
- ▶ Ayhan Korucu: President, Turkish American Chamber of Commerce of the Southeast (GA); Founding Board Member, Fulton Educational Services,

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Information taken from: Read Foundation IRS 990 Form 2013, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/lD6lu3y> (last checked 7/17/2017); Ali Gumus LinkedIn Profile, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/lm6oldk> (last checked 7/17/2017); Little Scholars of Arkansas Board Membership on IRS 990 Forms, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/kcy94qn> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁸⁷ Information taken from: Soner Tarim LinkedIn Profile, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/lfadqqg> (last checked 7/17/2017); Best Company Texas information page regarding Turkish American Business Council, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/lDwlfvq> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁸⁸ Information taken from Muhammet Turkay LinkedIn Profile, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/kferm4p> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁸⁹ Information taken from: Constantine, Mary. *Dishing with Suzan Merturek*. Knoxville.com. 16 September 2010. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/mku6zm9> (last checked 7/17/2017); Knoxville Charter Academy initial application, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/m8zwttl> (last checked 7/17/2017); Suzan Merturek on Triad Math and Science academy governing board from Triad initial application with North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, received in an email sent in response to 2017 FOIA request on 5/12/2017; *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Information taken from: Memphis School of Excellence board meeting minutes – newly elected to Board in 2016, available at <https://tinyurl.com/y9st7fgn> (last checked 7/17/2017); Society of Universal Dialogue IRS 990 Form 2009, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yb9nbaq5> (last checked 7/17/2017).

Inc. (GA); CEO, Fulton Science Academy Middle School (GA); CEO, Fulton Science Academy High School (GA); CEO, President, Fulton Sunshine Academy (GA); President, Fulton Science Academy Private School (GA).⁹¹

- ▶ Azamat Kolbaev: Budget Accountant, Operations Manager, Read Foundation (TN); Budget Accountant, North American University - a Gülenist university (TX); Student, International Ataturk Alattoo University (Turkey).⁹²
- ▶ Emin Kuzcu: Founding Board Member, Read Foundation (TN); Board Member, Society of Universal Dialogue (TN).⁹³
- ▶ Omer Casurluk: Former Executive Director, Society of Universal Dialogue (TN); Executive Director, Turkish American Chamber of Commerce Southeast (GA).⁹⁴
- ▶ Ismail Fidan: President, Society of Universal Dialogue (TN); Academic

Director, Outreach Coordinator, Atlantic Institute (TN); Lead Petitioner, multiple failed Tennessee Gülen schools (TN); position unknown, Coral Academy of Science (NV).⁹⁵

- ▶ Alp Levent: Executive Director, Turkish American Chamber of Commerce of the Southeast (GA); Advisory Board Member, Atlantic Institute Tennessee (TN).⁹⁶
- ▶ Adil Soyuer: Executive Director and Director of Economic Relations, Turkish American Chamber of Commerce of the Southeast (GA); Business Manager, Triad Math and Science Academy (NC); B.A. Economics, Karadeniz Teknik Universitesi (Turkey).⁹⁷
- ▶ Ahmet Vehbi Ugur: Treasurer, Turkish American Chamber of Commerce of the Southeast (GA); Owner, TruGlobe Inc. - which bought the Fulton Science Academy Charter School when it was sold at foreclosure for much less than it was worth (GA).⁹⁸

⁹¹ Information taken from: TACCS IRS 990 2011, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/ycnh3lor> (last checked 7/17/2017); FSAMS Audit, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/ybwt5837> (last checked 7/17/2017); FSAPS 990 forms, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/kq8yqex> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁹² Information taken from Azamat Kolbaev LinkedIn Profile, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y8k2oe7k> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁹³ Information taken from Society of Universal Dialogue IRS 990 Form 2009, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yb9nbaq5> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁹⁴ *Ibid*; information taken from Omer Casurluk LinkedIn profile, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/ybtqzmrq> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁹⁵ Information taken from: Board membership on Society of Universal Dialogue IRS 990 Form 2011, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yajw86qq> (last checked 7/17/2017); Atlantic Institute website, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/ybsjmkwr> (last checked 7/17/2017); Nolensville Academy Letter of Intent submitted 1/13/2013, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/l99ojfu> (last checked 7/17/2017); 2005 research study authored by Ismail Fidan and others involving students at Coral Academy of Science in Reno, Nevada titled *Teaching Basic Engineering Concepts in a K-12 Environment Using LEGO® Bricks and Robotics*, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y8u8zcmt> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁹⁶ Information taken from: Humphrey, Tom. *Campfield, Kane among lawmakers going on trip to Turkey, Azerbaijan; Groups with ties to Muslim leader paying*. Knoxville News Sentinel. 1 May 2013. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/mgjb9a8> (last checked 7/17/2017); Atlantic Institute of TN board members list, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9y9xj2n> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁹⁷ Information taken from TACCS IRS 990 Form 2011, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/ycnh3lor> (last checked 7/17/2017); Adil Soyuer LinkedIn Profile, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yaafjxnz> (last checked 7/17/2017).

⁹⁸ Information taken from: TACCS IRS 990 form 2012, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/ycnh3lor> (last checked 7/17/2017); TruGlobe Information acquired from Georgia Corporations Division of the GA Secretary of State, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/kzq4gte> (last checked 7/17/2017).

Notable Press Coverage and Research Regarding the Tennessee Gülenist Network

Lowary, Jake and Bado, Kirk A. 3 *Tennessee lawmakers took Gülen -funded trips to Turkey*. The Tennessean. 9 February 2017. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/ybz6tbbaa> (last checked 7/17/2017).

Humphrey, Tom. *Tenn. Lawmakers encounter Turkish protestors*. Knoxville News Sentinel. 9 June 2013. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/n46tbpt> (last checked 7/17/2017).

Humphrey, Tom Campfield. *Kane among lawmakers going on trip to Turkey, Azerbaijan; Groups with ties to Muslim leader paying*. Knoxville News Sentinel. 1 May 2013. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/mgjb9a8> (last checked 7/17/2017).

Kebede, Laura. *Here's who wants to open charter schools in Memphis in 2018*. Chalkbeat. 24 April 2017. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yb3auxoh> (last checked 7/17/2017).

Nichols, Megan. *Construction: \$2 million build-out for Memphis charter school*. Memphis Business Journal. 6 September 2016. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y8r7otlb> (last checked 7/17/2017).

Bailey, Clay and Jane Roberts. *Charter's affiliation under fire*. The Commercial Appeal. 12 June 2012. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/l6gds29> (last checked 7/17/2017).