

South Carolina



QUICK FACTS ON GÜLEN CHARTER SCHOOLS

SOUTH CAROLINA



NUMBER OF SCHOOLS

1

KNOWN AS

Green Charter Schools

TOTAL ENROLLMENT

559

CHARTER VENDOR

Greenville Renewable Energy Charter School

TOTAL REVENUES

\$5,234,068

RELATED INSTITUTIONS

Triad, Triangle, Queen City



Fulton Science (Closed Network)



River City Science, Discovery, Science Schools, Broward Math and Science, New Springs Schools, School of Math and Science



KEY PEOPLE



Imtiaz Harque



Amanda Yilmaz



Abdul Kadir Yildirim



Baran Menguloglu

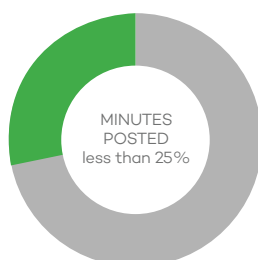


Abdulbasit "Akif" Aydin

QUESTIONABLE FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES

Numerous issues, including the school's extension of a loan to its landlord, suspect lease and rental payments for school facilities, and **the use of a third-party real estate organization that will own the school facilities even after the mortgage or the bond is repaid with public funds.**

Less than 25% of the minutes from meetings of the Green Board of Directors between 2013 to 2017 are posted on the school website.



The GREEN Charter School also shares an address with six entities that are likely related. **The relationship of these businesses to the school is unclear.**



H-1B VISA APPLICATIONS

195 H-1B

H-1B VISA APPLICATIONS 2001-2016

These applications were filed for such positions as: principal, curriculum coordinator, business operations specialist, instructional coordinator, business manager, and Science Olympiad coordinators.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

GREEN Charter School suffers from issues including a lack of transparency and accountability and potential conflicts of interest with affiliated organizations. **These issues paint a picture of the school in contrast to the image promoted by the school.**



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

Quick Facts

- ▶ Region: Southeast
- ▶ School Names (known as):
 - ▷ Green Charter Schools
- ▶ Total number of schools in state: 1 (second school opening 2017-2018)
- ▶ Total student enrollment 2015-16: 559
- ▶ Charter Holder/Governing Board(s):
 - ▷ Greenville Renewable Energy Charter School ("Green Charter Schools")
 - Organized as a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization
 - Oversees 1 charter, with a second charter school scheduled to open in 2017
- ▶ Charter Management Services Vendor: Charter Educational Services & Resources
- ▶ Regional Gülen Organization Oversight Entity: Charter Educational Services & Resources
- ▶ Regional Sister Networks: Triad (NC); Triangle (NC); Queen City (NC), River City Science (FL); Discovery (FL); Science Schools (FL); Broward Math and Science (FL); New Springs Schools (FL); School of Math and Science (FL); *Closed Network* Fulton Science (GA)
- ▶ Total Revenues for FY 2016: \$5,234,068¹
- ▶ South Carolina Network Founders:
 - ▷ Imtiaz Haque: Founder, Green Charter School (SC); Professor of Mechanical Engineering, Clemson University (SC).²
 - ▷ Amanda Yilmaz: Founder, Green Charter School (SC); French Teacher, Mauldin Middle School (SC).³
 - ▷ Abdul Kadir Yildirim: Founder, Green Charter School (SC); Assistant Professor, Furman University (SC); Research Scholar, Baker Institute for Public Policy (TX).⁴
 - ▷ Baran Menguloglu: Founder, Green Charter School (SC); Owner, Mengotorun Trading LLC (SA); QA Engineer, Magna International (Aurora, Canada); Vice President, South Carolina Dialogue Foundation (SC).⁵
 - ▷ Abdulbasit "Akif" Aydin: Green Charter School Founder (SC); Founding Board Member, River City Science Academy (FL); Director, Istanbul Cultural Center of Jacksonville (FL); Director, Amity Turkish Cultural Center (FL); President, Atlantic Institute of South Carolina (SC); Educational Director, the Atlantic Foundation of North Florida (2006-2010) (FL); Registered Agent, Green Apple Education (SC).⁶

¹ Revenues from Green Charter School Report on Financial Statements 2016, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/jwbfp7z> (last checked 6/17/2017).

² LinkedIn profile, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/nyzutpy> (last checked 6/17/2017).

³ Information taken from: LinkedIn profile, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/lotvd36> (last checked 6/17/2017); Green Charter School charter application, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/mb7sjmz> (last checked 6/17/2017).

⁴ Information taken from: Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy biography, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/n55v3bh> (last checked 6/18/2017); Green Charter School application, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/mb7sjmz> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁵ Information taken from: Green Charter School application, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/mb7sjmz> (last checked 6/17/2017); LinkedIn profile, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/kzgaayk> (last checked 6/17/2017); South Carolina Dialogue Foundation 2014 IRS Form 990, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/l3hexw8> (last checked 6/17/2017).

⁶ Green Charter School application, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/mb7sjmz> (last checked 6/17/2017); Green Apple Education Corporate Filings, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9ugzyps> (last checked 6/17/2017); WJCT article, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/j2a7b8q> (last checked 6/17/2017); The Florida Times-Union article, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y7pql78> (last checked 6/17/2017); The Post and Courier article, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/menn3mk> (last checked 6/17/2017).

Overview

The Greenville Renewable Energy Education Charter School (“Green Charter Schools”) is a new Gülen charter network in the Southeastern United States. It opened its first school, the GREEN Charter School - Greenville, in South Carolina in 2013. A second school, the Green Charter School of the Midlands, is set to open in the fall of 2017 in Irmo, SC. Green Charter Schools may be new to the Gülen Organization, but it shares many founders and vendors with other Gülen networks in the Southeast. For example, Abdulbasit Aydin, a founder of Green Charter Schools, also founded River City Education Services, Inc., a Gülen sister network in Florida with four schools. He currently serves as the President of the Atlantic Institute of South Carolina, which is a member of the Alliance for Shared Values, an umbrella organization for

key Gülen cultural organizations. In addition, GREEN Charter School - Greenville’s Principal taught at Amity Brooklyn, a private Gülen school in New York, and served as the Principal of the River City Science Academy in Florida.

The GREEN South Carolina network serves a disproportionately low percentage of vulnerable student populations than its district Greenville County Schools. For example, the district serves double the percentage of students with disabilities (15.4% vs. 7.2%); 12 times more English language learners (12% to <1%); and double the percentage of students who are economically disadvantaged (47% vs. 23%).⁷ This gives the impression that GREEN Charter School serves a disproportionately privileged group of students.

School	Operation	Student Demographic Information ⁸	Authorizer	Governing Board
Greenville Renewable Energy Education Charter School (GREEN Charter School - Greenville) 1440 Pelham Rd. Greenville, SC 29615	Grades K-9 2012-present ⁹	Enrollment: 559 54.9% White 11.6% Hispanic 18.1% Asian 13.8% African American 1.6% Other 7.2% SWD 23% FRL 0.9% ELL	South Carolina Department of Education – South Carolina Public Charter School District ¹⁰	Green Charter Schools
New Schools				
Green Charter School of the Midlands 7820 Broad River Rd. Irmo, SC 29063	Opening 2017-2018 ¹²			Green Charter Schools
New middle and high school campus for GREEN Charter School - Greenville 211 Century Drive Greenville, SC (Pelham Rd. campus will remain an elementary campus)	Opening 2017 - 2018			Green Charter Schools

⁷ Student demographic data, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yahlgtao> (last checked 6/18/17); *see also* Percentage of economically disadvantaged students, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y79qcbyt> (last checked 6/18/17).

⁸ Green Charter School Performance Framework Profile 2015-2016, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/lu3qbq> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁹ Basic information from the Green Charter annual report card 2015-2016, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/nxrybmb> (last checked 6/18/2017).

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ About Green Charter School from their official website, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/kputht9> (last checked 6/18/2017).

School	Operation	Student Demographic Information	Authorizer	Governing Board
Charter Petition Denials				
Greenville Palmetto Science Academy (a/k/a Greenville Science Charter School) ¹²	2006 - Denied Reapplied and rejected 2009 ¹³			Petitioners: Ali Ozer, Guven Yucesan, Mevlut Tascan

Data taken from 2015 - 2016 school year. *FRL: indicates students eligible for free/reduced price lunch; ELL indicates English language learners; SWD indicate students with disabilities.

A History of Strategic Ambiguity and Conflicting Interests

GREEN Charter School - Greenville suffers from the same problems endemic to other Gülen charter schools, including a lack of transparency and accountability and potential conflicts of interest with affiliated organizations. These issues paint a picture of the school in contrast to the image promoted by the school.

First, less than 25% of the minutes from meetings of the Green Board of Directors between 2013 to 2017 are posted on the school website,¹⁴ and minutes from the entire years of 2015 and 2016 have been taken down since research began on the school.¹⁵ Board minutes are an important public record documenting decisions regarding the use of public funds. As a result of the failure to post board minutes, information about important contracts, leases, and other Board decisions is largely inaccessible.

Board minutes for the GREEN Charter School - Greenville also show that the school's principal, Adem Dokmeci, interviewed candidates to serve as the principal for the new Green Midlands school and hired Osman Demirel.¹⁶

No information is provided about the principal recruitment process, including requirements and qualifications for the job, the number of applications received, the number of candidates interviewed, or the scoring criteria used to select the principal. Mr. Demirel formerly worked at the now closed Fulton Science Academy in Georgia and River City Science Academy in Florida, other Gülen Organization charter schools, while Mr. Dokmeci served as Principal at the River City Science Academy. The selection of a school principal is one of the most important responsibilities of the Board of Directors, yet little due diligence regarding the selection process is described in the board minutes.

The GREEN Charter School - Greenville, located at 1440 Pelham Road in Greenville, also shares an address with six entities that are likely related. It is unclear, however, whether these entities are affiliated, perform services for the Green Charter School, how they charge for services, and where the payments are reported. These six businesses include:

¹² The School District of Greenville County v. Greenville Science Charter School, No. 07-ALJ-30-0162-, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/kpazelj> (last checked 6/17/2017).

¹³ Greenville Palmetto Science Academy denial, Greenville County Schools Board Meeting from April 17, 2009, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/l2rg7j3> (last checked 6/18/2017).

¹⁴ 28 of 36 minutes over four years are not posted.

¹⁵ Green Charter School Board minutes; available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y7pwnwcs> (last checked 6/18/17).

¹⁶ Green Charter School Board Minutes from February 21, 2017, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y7pwnwcs> (last checked 6/18/17).

- ▶ **Blue Ocean Construction:** A FL-based construction company affiliated with the Gülen charter networks previously used the school's address as its business address.¹⁷ Blue Ocean Construction performed construction work on the Green Charter School property, as well as several Gülenist charter schools in Florida. It is owned by Mehmet Taskan, one of the Florida Gülen network founders.¹⁸
- ▶ **Green Apple Child Care:**¹⁹ This child-care center is not registered with the South Carolina Secretary of State. It accepts children ages 1 – 4 and offers before and after school care. It is unknown if Green Apple Childcare is related to Green Apple Education, LLC.
- ▶ **Green Apple Education, LLC:**²⁰ Green Apple Education (formerly Carolina Pizza) is registered with the Secretary of State as of February 2014 using the 1440 Pelham Road (Suite C) address. Abdulbasit "Akif" Aydin, Green Founder and River City Florida Founder, is listed as Green Apple Education's agent. It is unknown whether the Green Apple Childcare Center and Green Apple Education are related entities.
- ▶ **Sprinter Learning Center Education, LLC:**²¹ This company is registered with the South Carolina Secretary of State at 1440 Pelham Road as of March 2017 by Serkan Sen as its registered agent.
- ▶ **Sprinter Education Services, Inc.:** This company is registered with the South Carolina Secretary of State at 1440 Pelham Rd (Suite C) as of September 2013 by Oguz Tekin as its registered agent.

Tekin was a principal at New Springs School, a Florida Gülen charter school.

- ▶ **Sprinter Learning Center:** This company offers tutoring in Math, Reading/English, SAT/ACT Prep, and college essay preparation at an hourly rate of \$49.33. This entity is not registered with the South Carolina Secretary of State. Its relationship with Sprinter Learning Center Education, LLC and Sprinter Education Services, Inc., is unknown.

Additionally, financial reports for the GREEN Charter School – Greenville show \$358,956 for "student related" revenue in 2016 but provide no documentation about the source of this income. If the school is profiting from businesses that are located on site or operated by its founders, Board members, or affiliated individuals, those relationships should be disclosed and fully transparent.

The GREEN Charter School – Greenville also leases its property from a Gülenist landlord, Pelham Oaks Plaza LLC, owned by Yazan Khatib.²² This relationship, especially when coupled with the school's use of Blue Ocean Construction for construction work, raises serious red flags. Khatib and Mehmet Taskan, the owner of Blue Ocean Construction, worked together on other Gülenist charter schools in Florida. They profited extensively from a real estate deal that involved the purchase, renovation, and sale of the River City Science Academy facility in Jacksonville, Florida, where they made millions of dollars in profit at the school's, and the public's, expense. Their connection to the GREEN Charter School – Greenville is unsurprising, however. Adem Dokmeci previously served as the Principal of River City Science Academy and now serves as the Principal at the Green Charter School. Similarly, Abdulbasit Aydin founded both River

¹⁷ See address for Blue Ocean, AIHIT Data, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y9dcfg6o> (last checked 6/17/17).

¹⁸ Florida corporation records, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yajp97z7> (last checked 6/18/2017).

¹⁹ Address on Green Apple Childcare web site, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y8a9fg7u> (last checked 6/18/17).

²⁰ See corporate records from South Carolina Secretary of State, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/ya678rmf> (last checked 6/18/17).

²¹ *Id.*

²² Florida Secretary of State Business Entities, available from: <http://tinyurl.com/y7agk5od> (last checked 6/18/17).

City Education Services, the entity operating River City Science Academy, and the GREEN Charter School – Greenville.²³ The amount paid

by the school for its facility should be closely monitored due to the real estate issues in Florida with these individuals.

Financial Issues

External audits do not find deficiencies or weaknesses in the GREEN Charter School – Greenville’s financial statements. However, this report describes other questionable financial activities, including the school’s extension of

a loan to its landlord, suspect lease and rental payments for school facilities, and the use of a third-party real estate organization that will own the school facilities even after the mortgage or the bond is repaid with public funds.

Bond Financing

GREEN Midlands LLC borrowed \$5,845,000 at an interest rate of 5.250% for 97% of the borrowed funds in bonds issued by the South Carolina Job-Economic Development Authority on December 1, 2016. The financing will be used for purchasing, constructing, renovating, and equipping the new Green Charter School of the Midlands in Irmo, SC, scheduled to open in Fall 2017.²⁴ GREEN Midlands LLC will lease

the buildings to the Green Charter School of the Midlands through a triple net lease with the school responsible for paying all expenses, taxes, fees, and operational costs associated with the facility. The original GREEN Charter School – Greenville will not be financially liable for bond repayment. The two schools will be separate legal and financial organizations governed by the same Board of Directors.

Real Estate

The schools operated by Green Charter Schools will be located at three properties in 2017–2018 when the new Green Charter School of the Midlands school opens and the GREEN Charter School – Greenville expands to a new middle and high school campus. These schools are implicated with both Gülenist landlords and construction vendors.

GREEN Charter School – Greenville: The original school property at 1440 Pelham Road is leased from a Gülenist landlord. It’s also engaged a construction company for work with owners connected to the Gülen Organization

Florida networks and a prior relationship with the founder and principal of the GREEN Charter School – Greenville.

The landlord is Pelham Oaks Plaza LLC, a Florida company owned by Yazan Khatib.²⁵ Blue Ocean Construction, owned by Mehmet Taskan, managed a construction project for the GREEN charter school.²⁶ Khatib and Taskan have worked together before on real estate deals involving Gülen charter schools. They profited extensively from a real estate deal involving the River City Science Academy in Jacksonville, Florida, and they made millions of dollars in profit at the

²³ See the Florida State Profile for more information.

²⁴ Official Statement, Bond for GREEN Midlands LLC, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y7xbec3g> (last checked 6/18/2017).

²⁵ Florida Secretary of State Business Entities, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y7agk5od> (last checked 6/1/17).

²⁶ Greenville County construction permits, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yclmy2en> (last checked 6/18/17).

school's, and the public's, expense.²⁷ The school officials involved in this Florida deal are also the same as those on the school side in Greenville: Adem Dokmeci was the Principal of the River City Science Academy and now serves as the Principal at the GREEN Charter School – Greenville, and Abdulbasit “Akif” Aydin founded both River City Education Services and Green Charter Schools.

This prior relationship raises questions about whether the Board conducted a thorough search of all available property in Greenville to ensure it was considering the most cost-effective option before leasing property from Pelham Oaks Plaza LLC. Board meeting minutes disclose that the school paid the landlord rent of \$44,555 per month through February 2017 (\$534,660 annually).²⁸ Based on this information, the school has paid the landlord an estimated \$1,915,865 since it opened in 2013.²⁹ The purchase price for the Pelham Road property was \$2.5 million,³⁰ so the GREEN Charter School has already come close to paying off the cost of the original purchase price (interest not included). Notably, the school will pay these expensive rents with public funds, thereby subsidizing the purchase and ownership of the building by a Gülenist private landlord.

Both Khatib and Taskan are active in other Gülenist organizations. Khatib is a Board Member of the Atlantic Institute Jacksonville,³¹ an organization that is a member of the Alliance for

Shared Values, an openly Gülen national organization. Taskan incorporated both Discovery Education Services³² and Universal Education Services,³³ Gülen charter school networks in Florida. In addition, Taskan's company, Blue Ocean Construction, appears to be the preferred construction vendor for projects at Gülen schools in the Southeast.

The Green Charter School of the Midlands: The Green Charter School of the Midlands will open in Fall 2017. Its real property is owned by GREEN Midlands LLC (“GREEN Midlands”), a separate third-party organization that bought the facilities in December 2016 for \$2,850,000.³⁴ GREEN Midlands borrowed \$5,845,000 through bonds issued by the South Carolina Job-Economic Development Authority for the purchase and renovation of the facility.³⁵ GREEN Midlands will lease the property to the school through a triple net lease with the school responsible for paying all expenses, taxes, fees, and operational costs associated with the facility. The amount of the monthly rent is unknown. Adem Dokmeci, the former principal of the school, serves as the registered agent Green Midlands LLC. This use of a third party middle man entity controlled by other Gülenists allows the Gülen Organization to purchase and hold title to property paid for with public funds. Should the school later be terminated, the Gülen Organization will retain ownership of the publicly financed property.

Excessive Use of the H1-B Visa Program

Although the GREEN Charter School – Greenville has not filed any H1-B visas as of 2016, it has likely hired H-1B visa holders from

the Gülen Organization Florida networks due to the overlap of key individuals between the two states' networks. GREEN Charter School

²⁷ See the Florida profile in this report for more information about the real estate deal involving the River City Science Academy.

²⁸ Green Charter School Board minutes from February 21, 2017, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y7pwnwcs> (last checked 6/18/2017).

²⁹ August 2013 through February 2017 equals 43 months.

³⁰ Greenville County Register of Deeds, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yaqvujc> (last checked 6/18/2017).

³¹ Atlantic Institute Jacksonville, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y7hekwmf> (last checked 6/18/2017).

³² Discovery Education Services, Articles of Incorporation available at: <http://tinyurl.com/ml8qjeh> (last checked 6/18/2017).

³³ Universal Education Services, corporate information available at: <http://tinyurl.com/kwwpz7p> (last checked 6/18/2017).

³⁴ Green Midlands LLC property records, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/n5wvsbt> (last checked 6/18/2017).

³⁵ Official Statement, Bond for GREEN Midlands LLC (December 1, 2016), available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y7xbec3g> (last checked 6/18/2017).

– Greenville’s principal formerly served as principal at the River City Science Academy and has brought at least one other Turkish employee from that school to the GREEN Charter School – Greenville. GREEN Charter School – Greenville’s key founder also founded River City Science Academy. Other Gülen charter schools utilize the H-1B visa program to immigrate large numbers of Turkish Gülenists into the United States for employment in the schools and network.

The Florida network filed at least 195 H-1B applications from 2001-2016, including at least 71 H-1B applications filed by the River City Education Services network.³⁶ While the Gülen Organization typically states that these H-1Bs are only to fill shortage areas for math and science teachers, these applications were filed for such positions as: principal, curriculum coordinator, business operations specialist, instructional coordinator, business manager, and Science Olympiad coordinators. Florida’s Gülen charter schools use the same immigration attorneys to file and process their H-1B applications as other known Gülen Organization charter networks, vendors, and cultural associations, indicating once again the existence of an overall network. For example:

- ▶ Cherie Cookorinis: the Florida network (including: Discovery, River City, New Springs, Neosprings, Stars Education,

Galaxy) used Cookorinis, a Georgia-based attorney to file numerous H-1B applications.³⁷ Cookorinis also filed applications for:

- ▷ Fulton Science (GA)
- ▷ Chesapeake Lighthouse Foundation (MD)
- ▷ Triad Math and Science (NC)
- ▷ Charter Educational Services & Resources (GA, FL)
- ▷ Grace Institute (GA, FL)

- ▶ Remzi Kulen: the Florida network used Kulen, a New York-based attorney, to file numerous H-1B applications.³⁸ Kulen also filed applications for:

- ▷ Orlando Culture and Dialog Center (FL)
- ▷ Blue Ocean Construction (FL)
- ▷ Fulton Science (GA)
- ▷ Charter Educational Services & Resources (GA, FL)
- ▷ Concept Schools (OH, IL, IN, MI, MN)
- ▷ Pioneer (MA)
- ▷ Niagara Foundation (IL)
- ▷ Young Scholars (PA)
- ▷ Gülen’s home, the Golden Generation Workshop Center (PA)
- ▷ Academy of Science, Syracuse, Buffalo (NY)
- ▷ Arts and Science, Bergen, Passaic (NJ)

Notable Turkish Vendors

Blue Ocean Construction, Inc.: Blue Ocean Construction appears to be the preferred construction vendor for Gülenist charter schools throughout the Florida and the Southeastern region. Blue Ocean Construction renovated the GREEN Charter School - Greenville building.³⁹ Green Charter School’s landlord at this site and the owner of Blue Ocean were partners in at

least two real estate deals in Florida involving other Gülen schools that resulted in significant profits to the two business partners.⁴⁰

Charter Educational Services & Resources (“CESR”) (formerly known as Grace Institute): CESR is a smaller-scale charter management organization that oversees the Southeastern

³⁶ MyVisaJobs.com for River City Education Services, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/lb6kgyk> (last checked 6/18/2017).

³⁷ List of entities represented by Cherie Cookorinis, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/m4e6cgl> (last checked 6/18/2017).

³⁸ List of entities represented by Remzi Kulen, available at <http://tinyurl.com/gptwx5x> (last checked 6/18/2017).

³⁹ Greenville County Building Safety Department Permits, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yclmy2en> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁴⁰ See the Florida State Profile for additional information.

region of the Gülen Organization, including Green Charter Schools, the Florida networks, and the failed Fulton Science (GA) network. CESR is incorporated by a former Fulton Science (GA) administrator, Avni Cokavci, and receives a per-head amount in fees from each of its customer charter schools, allegedly for curricular support, professional development, and student information management systems. The Florida schools and the Green Charter School all use CESR to “power” their online intranet.⁴¹ The Florida schools, and likely the Green Charter School, use CESR to manage their student information systems, a function that Gülen schools appear almost always to contract out to an affiliated private Gülen organization. Because there is little reference to

vendor contracts in the GREEN Charter School - Greenville board minutes, and because many board minutes have been removed from the website, it is difficult to confirm the use of CESR for this service. However, the GREEN Charter School - Greenville reported a very large expenditure of almost \$1 million for “purchased services” on its 2016 financial statement without any explanation about how these dollars were used.⁴² Notably, CESR was formerly known as the Grace Institute, and the series of audits that ultimately resulted in the closure of the Fulton Science (GA) charter schools raised serious concerns that the Grace Institute appeared to be a sham corporation that did not provide any services of value to its charter school customers.⁴³

Scandals, Investigations, & Notable Activities

Green Charter Schools voted in March 2014 to take preferential actions related to its landlord for the Pelham Road property that raises questions about whether the board had an arm’s length relationship with the landlord. At that time, the board voted to advance rental payments of \$100,000 to the landlord for construction costs, essentially extending a loan to the landlord to be repaid in reduced rental payments over time.⁴⁴ There was no discussion at the time about the actual terms of the lease and whether the landlord was responsible for those improvements to the school. There was no indication of whether the parties documented this transaction, or whether the landlord paid interest on the loan. Such actions appear to have placed the interests of the Gülenist landlord above the best interests of the school.

In addition, the GREEN Charter School - Greenville stated in its original charter application that the school “shall perform a rigorous facility search with leading real estate agencies in the [sic] Greenville County.”⁴⁵ Yet, Board minutes do not show whether the Board conducted a thorough search of all available properties to lease in Greenville to ensure it was identifying the most cost effective option for the Green Charter School. In light of the numerous connections between the landlord chosen and the school’s leadership, it appears such a search was either not conducted, or was conducted with the plan for a related Gülenist entity to purchase the property on behalf of the school.

⁴¹ All of the following school websites contain the language “Powered by Charter Educational Services & Resources,” evidencing the tie between CESR’s Gülenist charter school customers, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/l54sqwb> (last checked 6/18/2017), <http://tinyurl.com/mm9s22a> (last checked 6/18/2017), <http://tinyurl.com/kofnlk4> (last checked 6/18/2017), <http://tinyurl.com/krpfzqs> (last checked 6/18/2017), <http://tinyurl.com/k35qx8y> (last checked 6/18/2017), <http://tinyurl.com/lke2m4c> (last checked 6/18/2017), <http://tinyurl.com/m2vxrfu> (last checked 6/18/2017), <http://tinyurl.com/lv23dcd> (last checked 6/18/2017), <http://tinyurl.com/kxth73j> (last checked 6/18/2017), <http://tinyurl.com/ybbnaa3r> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁴² Green Charter School Report on Financial Statements 2016, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/jwbfp7z> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁴³ See Georgia profile for more information about CESR/Grace Institute.

⁴⁴ Green Charter School Board minutes from March 11, 2014, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y7pwnwcs> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁴⁵ Green Charter School 2012 charter application, at p. 214, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/mb7sjmz> (last checked 6/18/2017).

Gülenist Cultural and Business Organizations Active in State

We believe 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 who can benefit the organization are honored, convening forums and conferences, and sponsoring 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.

Atlantic Institute South Carolina: The Atlantic Institute is a Gülen-affiliated nonprofit organization with regional branches throughout the Southeast in Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, and South Carolina.⁴⁶ It was formerly called the South Carolina Dialogue Foundation.⁴⁷ It promotes Gülen's teachings and interfaith dialogue, hosts awards dinners, forums on various topics, and other community events, and sponsors trips to Turkey for local elected officials and leaders. The Atlantic Institute South Carolina has hosted events

in Greenville, Columbia, Charleston, Clemson, and Spartanburg⁴⁸ and coordinates activities with the South Carolina Dialogue Foundation.⁴⁹ The Atlantic Institute is a member organization of the Alliance for Shared Values (Alliance), the umbrella organization for six Gülen groups around the United States that are openly aligned with the Gülen Movement.⁵⁰ Key leaders of the Institute include:

- Turan Kilic: President and CEO of the Atlantic Institute;⁵¹ formerly of the Dialogue Institute of the Southwest.⁵²
- Abdulbasit "Akif" Aydin: President of the South Carolina Dialogue Foundation;⁵³ President of the Atlantic Institute South Carolina;⁵⁴ Founder of the GREEN Charter School - Greenville.⁵⁵
- Baran Menguloglu: Former Vice President of the South Carolina Dialogue Foundation;⁵⁶ founder of the GREEN Charter School - Greenville.⁵⁷
- Tuncay Kamas: Former Treasurer of the South Carolina Dialogue Foundation.⁵⁸

Examples of community events hosted by the Institute include:

- The Greenville Future Leaders of Dialogue Dinner on November 1,

⁴⁶ Fethullah Gülen bio on Atlantic Institute's website, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/jwbfp7z> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁴⁷ Tony Bartelme & Rachel Baye, *Capitol Gains: S.C. Politicians Use Office to Pad Pockets*, The Center for Public Integrity (September 25, 2015, updated March 10, 2016), available at: <http://tinyurl.com/ybwjvc6g> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁴⁸ Future Leaders Dialogue Dinners, Atlantic Institute South Carolina, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y6v3otoa> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁴⁹ South Carolina Dialogue Foundation IRS 990 Form, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yazfqh8y> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁵⁰ Alliance for Shared Values on Atlantic Institute website, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/ybsjmkwr> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁵¹ Turan Kilic's bio, The Atlantic Institute, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/ltkrsr7> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁵² Turan Kilic in Texas, Corporation Wiki, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/n2ak53w> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁵³ SC Dialogue Foundation, IRS Form 990 – 2015; available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y7egsqhj> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁵⁴ Atlantic Institute South Carolina, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yayk6sff> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁵⁵ Board Biographical Information; Green Charter School application (April 30, 2012), available at: <https://tinyurl.com/mb7sjmz> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁵⁶ South Carolina Dialogue Foundation IRS 990 2014, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y8sg55lc> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁵⁷ Green Charter School application, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/ltkrsr7> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁵⁸ South Carolina Dialogue Foundation IRS 990 2014, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yazfqh8y> (last checked 6/18/2017).

2016, with Pamela Evette, President/CEO of Quality Business Solutions in Greenville, as keynote speaker.⁵⁹

- ▶ The Charleston Peace and Dialogue Awards Dinner in 2016 honoring State Representative Jenny Horne, and members of the Post and Courier.⁶⁰
- ▶ Columbia Dialogue and Friendship Dinner in 2016 honoring Sheriff Leon Lott, Richland County Sheriff's Department.⁶¹

Istanbul Cultural Center: Like Turkish cultural centers in other states across the country, the Istanbul Cultural Centers in South Carolina promote Turkish culture through language and cooking classes, festivals, and local events. The Center also sponsors annual "dialogue" trips to Turkey for community members and leaders.⁶² The Center is located at the same address as the Atlantic Institute South Carolina. It has multiple branches throughout South Carolina in Clemson, Greenville, Columbia and Charleston.⁶³

Friends of Gülen Spotlight

Sixteen South Carolina state-elected officials traveled to Turkey on trips sponsored by Gülen-affiliated organizations, including the Atlantic Foundation and the South Carolina Dialogue Foundation):⁶⁴

- ▶ Senator Creighton Coleman (2012)⁶⁵
- ▶ Senator Mike Fair, Senate Education Committee (2012)⁶⁶
- ▶ Senator Brad Hutto (2012)⁶⁷
- ▶ Senator John Land, State Senator (2012)⁶⁸

- ▶ Senator Phil Leventis (2012)⁶⁹
- ▶ Senator John Matthews (2012)⁷⁰
- ▶ Representative Mandy Norrell⁷¹
- ▶ Senator Mike Rose (2012)⁷²
- ▶ Senator John Scott⁷³
- ▶ Senator Vince Sheheen (2012)⁷⁴
- ▶ Representative Neal Collins (House Education Committee) (2015)⁷⁵

⁵⁹ Greenville FLDD at the Atlantic Institute, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/ybod2vjr> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁶⁰ Peace and Dialogue award dinner at the Atlantic Institute, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9kdc92u> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁶¹ Columbia Dialogue and Friendship dinner (2013), available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9dy4fps> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁶² Istanbul Cultural Center, About Us, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/n4msdw5> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁶³ Istanbul Cultural Center, Greenville Branch, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/k6xwwen> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁶⁴ Center for Public Integrity list of identified lawmakers who took trips to Turkey funded by Gülen-affiliated organizations, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/lzd8zsl> (last checked 6/18/2017); The Nerve article about trips to Turkey funded by Gülen-affiliated organizations, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/mpsym4p> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁶⁵ List of lawmakers who took trips to Turkey funded by Gülen-affiliated organizations, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/lzd8zsl> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁶⁶ *Id.*

⁶⁷ *Id.*

⁶⁸ *Id.*

⁶⁹ *Id.*

⁷⁰ *Id.*

⁷¹ *Id.*

⁷² *Id.*

⁷³ *Id.*

⁷⁴ *Id.*

⁷⁵ Nathaniel Cary, *SC Legislator trips sponsored by cleric accused in coup attempt*, The State (February 10, 2017), available at: <https://tinyurl.com/leph3z> (last checked 6/18/2017).

- ▶ Representative Todd Rutherford (2015)⁷⁶
 - ▶ Representative John King (2015)⁷⁷
 - ▶ (Former) Representative Mary Tinkler (2015)⁷⁸
 - ▶ Representative Cezar McKnight (2015)⁷⁹
 - ▶ Representative David Weeks (2015)⁸⁰
- Additional community members who accepted trips to Turkey include leaders such as:
- ▶ Mark Fallaw, Chief of Police for North Town South Carolina; and⁸¹
 - ▶ James Alton Cannon, Jr., Sheriff of Charleston County.⁸²

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.

- ▶ Adem Dokmeci: Principal, Green Charter School (SC); Registered Agent for GREEN Midlands LLC (SC);⁸³ Principal, River City Science Academy (FL);⁸⁴ Vice Principal, Brooklyn Amity School (NY);⁸⁵ Teacher in Turkey, Uzbekistan, and Indonesia;⁸⁶ B.S., Marmara Universitesi (Istanbul, Turkey).⁸⁷
- ▶ Yavuz Koruk: Board Member, Green Charter School;⁸⁸ Petitioner, Asheville Math and Science Academy (NC), a failed charter school in North Carolina;⁸⁹ President, Nyte Inc (NC) which has applied for H1-B visas for construction positions.⁹⁰
- ▶ Ali Ozer: Founding Principal, T.E.A.C.H. (GA); Executive Director, Fulton Science network (GA); CEO, CFO, President, Grace Institute (GA); Curriculum Director, Fulton Science Academy Middle school (GA); 2006 Lead Petitioner, Greenville Science Charter School (SC) (denied in 2009).⁹¹

⁷⁶ *Id.*

⁷⁷ *Id.*

⁷⁸ *Id.*

⁷⁹ *Id.*

⁸⁰ *Id.*

⁸¹ Mark Fallaw trip to Turkey, Istanbul Cultural Center, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/lbvk79s> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁸² *Id.*

⁸³ Green Midlands LLC property records, available at <https://tinyurl.com/n5wvsbt> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁸⁴ LinkedIn profile, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/lctzf2u> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁸⁵ Seth Kugel, *Neighborhood Report: Sheepshead Bay; A Small School Run by Turks Takes the Stage*, New York Times (March 21, 2004), available at: <http://tinyurl.com/ycomlpvo> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁸⁶ *Id.*

⁸⁷ LinkedIn profile, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/lctzf2u> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁸⁸ Green Charter School board meeting minutes, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y8whza82> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁸⁹ Petitioner information, Asheville Math and Science Academy initial application (December 6, 2013), available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y7tfq738> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁹⁰ Nyte Inc. on MyVisaJobs.com, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9eaf69w> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁹¹ Information taken from: FSAMS Audit, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/ybwt5837> (last checked 6/18/2017); Fulton Educational Services 2005 IRS Form 990, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/zxtjkrm> (last checked 6/18/2017); Greenville Science Charter School denial, Greenville County Schools Board Meeting from April 17, 2009, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/l2rg7j3> (last checked 6/18/2017).

- ▶ Zulfikar Berk: Registered Agent, Blue Ocean Construction (SC) (listed at same address as GREEN Charter School in 2014);⁹² President, Intercultural Dialogue Student Organization at the University of South Carolina Columbia (SC);⁹³ Owns the domain for the Atlantic Institute South Carolina;⁹⁴ Bachelors, Abnat Izzet Baysal Universitesi (Turkey).⁹⁵
- ▶ Oguz Tekin: Registered Agent, Sprinter Education Services (SC) (shares an address with the GREEN Charter School – Greenville);⁹⁶ Principal, New Springs School (FL).⁹⁷
- ▶ Serkan Sen: Registered Agent, Sprinter Learning Center Education (SC).⁹⁸
- ▶ Yazan Khatib: Owner, Pelham Oaks Plaza LLC (SC); Owner, River City Plaza LLC (FL) which owns the River City Science Academy property;⁹⁹ President, Khatib Development (FL).¹⁰⁰
- ▶ Mehmet Taskan: Incorporator, Discovery Education Services, Inc. (FL); Incorporator, Universal Education Services, Inc. (FL); Owner, Blue Ocean Construction (FL); Employee, Khatib Development LLC – Gülenist Landlord entity (FL).¹⁰¹

Notable Press Coverage and Research Regarding the South Carolina Gülenist Network

- ▶ Young, Melinda., *Buildings Purchased for GREEN Charter School*, Greenville Journal, July 6, 2016. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/yag8elag> (last checked 6/17/2017).
- ▶ Cary, Nathaniel. *SC Legislators Among Those Who Took Turkey Trips*. USA Today, February 9, 2017. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/y8zfmnfq> (last checked 6/17/2017).
- ▶ Pardue, Doug. *Group blamed for Turkish Coup courted S.C. Leaders Recipients say free travel to Turkey*. The Post and Courier, July 20, 2016. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/menn3mk> (last checked 6/18/2017).
- ▶ Brundrett, Rick. *S.C. Legislators Say 'No Agenda' on Trip to Turkey*. The Nerve. November 16, 2012. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/mpsym4p> (last checked 6/18/2017).
- ▶ Cary, Nathaniel. *SC Legislator Trips Sponsored by Cleric Accused in Coup Attempt*. The State, February 10, 2017. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/leph3z> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁹² Blue Ocean Construction Corporate Information, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9lgwoeb> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁹³ Intercultural Dialogue Student Organization information, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y92q94jq> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁹⁴ Atlantic Institute SC website ownership information, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9b4frtw> (last checked 56/18/2017).

⁹⁵ LinkedIn profile; available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y7hk8hl5> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁹⁶ Sprinter Education Services corporate filings, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y7seyk5k> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁹⁷ Principal available from Hillsborough County Public Schools, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y7shcxvw> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁹⁸ Secretary of State Corporate filing for Sprinter Learning Center Education, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9f2ua7m> (last checked 6/18/2017).

⁹⁹ Foreclosure information, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/mzgx2u7> (last checked 6/18/2017); property history, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/leqctfa> (last checked 6/18/2017); River City Plaza LLC corporate information, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/mc32ngh> (last checked 6/18/2017); Khatib Development corporate information available at: <http://tinyurl.com/kczqg5u> (last checked 6/18/2017).

¹⁰⁰ Khatib Development Corporate filings available at: <https://tinyurl.com/kczqg5u> (last checked 6/18/2017).

¹⁰¹ Information taken from: Articles of Incorporation for Discovery Education Services, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/ml8qjeh> (last checked 6/18/2017); Universal Education Services corporate information, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/kwvpz7p> (last checked 6/18/2017); River City Plaza LLC corporate information, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/mc32ngh>; Khatib Development corporate information available at: <http://tinyurl.com/kczqg5u> (last checked 6/18/2017); Blue Ocean Corporate filings, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/lb5e5bs> (last checked 6/18/2017).