Charter Schools Tied to Turkey Grow in Texas

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Published: Tuesday, June 7, 2011 at 5:09 a.m.

Last Modified: Tuesday, June 7, 2011 at 5:09 a.m.

It was one of six big charter school contracts TDM and another upstart company have shared since January 2009, a total of $50 million in construction business. Other companies scrambling for work in a poor economy wondered: How had they qualified for such big jobs so fast?

The secret lay in the meteoric rise and financial clout of the Cosmos Foundation, a charter school operator founded a decade ago by a group of professors and businessmen from Turkey. Operating under the name Harmony Schools, Cosmos has moved quickly to become the largest charter school operator in Texas, with 33 schools receiving more than $100 million a year in taxpayer funds.

While educating schoolchildren across Texas, the group has also nurtured a close-knit network of businesses and organizations run by Turkish immigrants. The businesses include not just big contractors like TDM but also a growing assemblage of smaller vendors selling school lunches, uniforms, after-school programs, Web design, teacher training and even special education assessments.
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