

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CHARTER SCHOOL FACILITY LANDSCAPE IN OKLAHOMA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the spring of 2018, the **NATIONAL CHARTER SCHOOL RESOURCE CENTER (NCSRC)**, the Colorado League of Charter Schools (the League), the Oklahoma Public School Resource Center (OPSRC), and the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (National Alliance) collaborated to collect data and information about charter school facilities and facilities expenditures in the state of Oklahoma. The data collection in Oklahoma was supported by the Charter School Facilities Initiative (CSFI), which is a national project funded by the U.S. Department of Education to research charter school facilities and facilities expenditures across the country. **The information contained in this report is based on data collected from the Charter School Facilities Survey in Oklahoma for the 2017-18 school year.**





Key findings include:

- 1. Charter school demand is high in Oklahoma and schools will need assistance with securing larger facilities to meet their growth projections.**
 - In 2017-18, **80 percent** of charter schools had a waitlist (16/20).
 - **75 percent** of schools planned to increase their student enrollment over the next 5 years (15/20), with plans to add an additional 352 students on average.
 - **75 percent** of schools reported that their current facility will not be adequate for their projected enrollment 5 years from now (15/20).
- 2. Oklahoma charter schools spent, on average, \$222 per pupil annually on facilities and this spending varied across different ownership types.**
 - The average rent paid by each school was **\$184,816 annually**.
 - Facility expenditures varied significantly depending on the type of entity that owned the facility, ranging from **\$76 per pupil** to **\$451 per pupil**.
- 3. Although co-location presents challenges for Oklahoma charter schools, they still would consider co-location in an underutilized district facility if given the option.**
 - **40 percent** of schools co-located with another school or organization in 2017-18 (8/20).
 - **63 percent** of charter schools that co-locate reported that co-location interfered with their ability to implement their academic curriculum and education model (5/8).
 - **53 percent** of schools reported that there is an underutilized public school district owned facility near their school (10/19) and **70 percent** of these schools would be willing to co-locate in the underutilized facility owned by the public school district (7/10).

4. Half of Oklahoma charter schools lack the facility amenities and specialized instructional spaces they require to best implement their educational program.

- **53 percent** of schools did not have a dedicated library or media center (10/19).
- **37 percent** of schools did not have a dedicated music room (7/19).
- **75 percent** of all charter schools in Oklahoma did not have their own outdoor athletic field (15/20).

5. Oklahoma charter schools require additional resources to improve the safety of their facility and had facility-related concerns about the learning environment.

- **71 percent** of Oklahoma charter schools require additional resources to improve the safety of their facility (12/17).
- **55 percent** of schools did not have adequate space on the school site for drop-off and pick-up of students (11/20).
- **60 percent** of school leaders reported that noise generated in other classrooms or corridors was disruptive to learning (12/20).

The report concludes with recommendations for policy solutions that could be used to address the facilities challenges in Oklahoma's charter schools.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Key Findings

- #1: Charter school demand is high in Oklahoma and schools will need assistance with securing larger facilities to meet their growth projections
- #2: Oklahoma charter schools spent, on average, \$222 per pupil annually on facilities and this spending varied across different ownership types.
- #3: Although co-location presents challenges for Oklahoma charter schools, they still would consider co-location in an underutilized district facility if given the option
- #4: Half of Oklahoma charter schools lack the facility amenities and specialized instructional spaces they require to best implement their educational program.
- #5: Oklahoma charter schools require additional resources to improve the safety of their facility had facility-related concerns about the learning environment

Conclusions

Recommendations

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INTRODUCTION

Charter School Facilities Initiative Background

Charter schools are public schools that are tuition-free and are open to all students.¹ Charter schools operate under an independent contract with an authorizer, which allows the school to operate with autonomy related to curriculum, staff, and budget.² An authorizer may be a school district, government agency, or university, depending on the state law.³ Charter schools are held to the same accountability standards as traditional public schools. During the 2017-18 school year, charter schools across the United States served more than 3 million students, accounting for approximately 6 percent of all K-12 public school students.⁴ Nationwide, there has been increasing demand and need for charter schools, yet access to adequate school facilities is a continued barrier to the growth of the charter school sector.⁵

Public charter schools often do not have equal access to adequate facilities. Traditional public school districts typically have sole ownership of school facilities, and often charter schools have no legal rights to access these buildings, even though they are public schools.⁶ As a result, charter schools often operate in non-traditional spaces, such as strip malls, churches, or converted buildings, which place constraints on instructional practices.⁷ Since these non-traditional spaces are not equipped to function as a school, charter schools must spend additional funding on facilities in order to renovate an existing building or build a facility to meet the needs of their students.⁸

Additionally, charter school facilities often do not receive equal facilities funding.⁹ Public charter schools rarely receive the same amount of facilities funding as traditional public schools.¹⁰ The type of financing that charter schools can access varies by state, with some states passing laws to help provide charter schools with better access to state funding and financing options.¹¹ In order to help states advocate for equal facilities and funding access, there is a need for additional research to collect data on state-specific facilities challenges.

1 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. (2018). About Charter Schools. <https://www.publiccharters.org/about-charter-schools>

2 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. (2018). Charter School FAQ. <https://www.publiccharters.org/about-charter-schools/charter-school-faq#public>

3 Ibid.

4 Wolfe, C. (2018). Strengthening Federal Investment in Charter School Facilities. National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

5 Ibid.

6 Smith, N. (2012). An Accident of History: Breaking the District Monopoly on Public School Facilities. National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

7 Wolfe, C. (2018). Strengthening Federal Investment in Charter School Facilities. National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

8 Smith, N. (2012). An Accident of History: Breaking the District Monopoly on Public School Facilities. National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

9 Simnick, R. (2015). State Policy Snapshot: School District Facilities and Public Charter Schools. National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

History of the Charter School Facilities Initiative

The Charter School Facilities Initiative began in Colorado in 2007, after the League heard anecdotal information about the number of inadequate and costly facilities throughout Colorado. In order to gather objective, reliable facilities data about Colorado's charter community the League developed a comprehensive survey, the Charter School Facilities Survey. The League developed the Charter School Facilities Survey in partnership with a national leader in school facilities, Paul Hutton, AIA, of Cunningham Group Architecture, and experts in school planning, Wayne Eckerling, Ph.D. and Allen Balczarek. The League used this survey in Colorado during the 2007-2008 school year and published the results of the Charter School Facilities Survey in a 2008 report entitled *Shortchanged Charters: How Funding Disparities Hurt Colorado's Charter Schools*.

Seeing the success of the Colorado facilities initiative, the National Alliance partnered with the League to use the Colorado facilities survey model in other states to assess the charter facilities landscape across the country. In a pilot program spanning six months in 2010-11, the League and the National Alliance partnered with state charter school organizations (CSOs) in Georgia, Indiana and Texas to collect state specific data comparable to what took place in Colorado. Since 2011, the League's work through the CSFI has been funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Charter School Program through a subcontract with the NCSRC. The CSFI informs policy and practice by collecting and disseminating comprehensive data regarding the state of charter school facilities, including the cost and quality of charter school buildings, charter school access to school district facilities, and the availability of local and state funding for charter school facilities.

Since 2010, the CSFI has collected data on over 2,000 charter school facilities across the United States. To date, 20 states have participated in the CSFI: Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas. The results are published in a series of state specific reports jointly authored by the League, the National Alliance, and respective CSO partners and are available at <http://facilitiesinitiative.org/>.

Charter Schools in Oklahoma

Charter schools in Oklahoma are public schools. Oklahoma’s charter school law was enacted in 1999 to “improve student learning; increase learning opportunities for students; encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods; provide additional academic choices for parents and students; require the measurement of student learning and create different and innovative forms of measuring student learning; establish new forms of accountability for schools; and create new professional opportunities for teachers and administrators including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site.”¹² In 2015, the Oklahoma School Act was revised, and it now allows charter schools to be authorized across the state of Oklahoma and it also created additional authorizers.¹³ Oklahoma’s charter schools can be authorized by any of the following types of authorizers: a school district, a technology center school district, a higher education institution or community college, a regional institution with an accredited teacher education program, the Oklahoma State Board of Education, federally recognized Indian tribes, or the Statewide Virtual Charter School Board.¹⁴

During the 2017-18 school year, there were 30 charter schools in Oklahoma.¹⁵ Four of those schools were virtual charter schools authorized by the Statewide Virtual Charter School Board.¹⁶ 29,033 students attended a charter school in the 2017-18 school year or approximately 4 percent of all public school students in Oklahoma.¹⁷ In 2017, the OPSRC received a U.S. Department of Education Charter Schools Program grant that provides funding for 25 additional charter schools in Oklahoma over the next five years, potentially doubling the number of charter schools in Oklahoma.¹⁸

12 Oklahoma Charter School Act, 70-3-131.

13 United States Department of Education (2018). Awards. <https://innovation.ed.gov/what-we-do/charter-schools/state-entities/awards/>

14 Oklahoma Charter School Act, 70-3-132.

15 Oklahoma State Department of Education. (2018). Current Charter Schools of Oklahoma. <http://sde.ok.gov/sde/current-charter>

16 Oklahoma State Department of Education. (2018). Oklahoma Virtual Charter Schools Program. <http://sde.ok.gov/sde/oklahoma-virtual-charter-schools-program>

17 Oklahoma State Department of Education. (2018). State Public Enrollment Totals. <http://sde.ok.gov/sde/documents/state-student-public-enrollment>

18 U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation & Improvement. (2017). <https://innovation.ed.gov/what-we-do/charter-schools/state-entities/awards/>

Charter School Facilities Law in Oklahoma

Currently, Oklahoma has a state-funded source for charter school facilities, the Charter Schools Incentive Fund. This fund provides “financial support to charter school applicants and charter schools for start-up costs and costs associated with renovating or remodeling existing buildings and structures for use by a charter school.”¹⁹ Charter schools can apply for up to \$50,000 per school for costs associated with renovating or remodeling facilities.²⁰ However, this fund has not been funded by the state legislature for several years. The Oklahoma charter law also states that charter schools can access the State Public Common School Building Equalization Fund.²¹ However, the Equalization Fund has never had any funding allocated to it. While Oklahoma has two state-funded options in place, neither option is currently funded.

Each year, the National Alliance evaluates state charter school laws and assigns an overall state ranking based on a corresponding evaluation rubric.²² In 2018, the National Alliance ranked Oklahoma #22 on its charter law out of 45 states.²³ The National Alliance notes in the report that one of the biggest areas for improvement in Oklahoma’s charter law is ensuring equitable access to capital funding and facilities.²⁴ In the category of “Equitable Access to Capital Funding and Facilities” Oklahoma received a score of 1 out of 4, due to a “state law that includes a small number of the model law’s provisions for equitable access to capital funding and facilities.”²⁵

19 Oklahoma Charter School Act, 70-3-128.

20 Oklahoma State Department of Education. (2017). Oklahoma Charter Schools Program. <http://sde.ok.gov/sde/faqs/oklahoma-charter-schools-program>

21 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. (2018). Charter Law Database. <https://www.publiccharters.org/our-work/charter-law-database/states/oklahoma>

22 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. (2018). Charter Law Rankings FAQ. <https://www.publiccharters.org/our-work/charter-law-database/charter-law-rankings-faq#modellaw>

23 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. (2018). Measuring Up To The Model: A Ranking of State Public Charter School Laws. National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

Based on the National Alliance's evaluation, Oklahoma law does not have the following essential components of a strong charter school law:

- A per-pupil facilities allowance that annually reflects average district capital costs.
- A state grant program for charter school facilities.
- A requirement for districts to provide school district space or funding to charter schools if the majority of that school's students reside in that districts.
- The right of first refusal to purchase or lease at or below fair market value a closed, unused, or underused public school facility or property.
- A state loan program for charter school facilities.
- Pledging the moral obligation of the state to help charter schools obtain more favorable bond financing terms.
- The creation and funding of a state charter school debt reserve fund.
- The inclusion of charter schools in school district bond and mill levy requests.
- A mechanism to provide credit enhancement for charter school facilities.
- Certain entities allowed to provide space to charter schools within their facilities under their preexisting zoning and land use designations.
- Charter school facilities exempt from ad valorem taxes and other assessment fees not applicable to other public schools.²⁶

26 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. (2018). Charter Law Database. <https://www.publiccharters.org/our-work/charter-law-database/states/oklahoma>



Methodology

The information contained in this report is based on data collected from the Charter School Facilities Survey in Oklahoma during the 2017-18 school year. The Charter School Facilities Survey consists of 55 base questions which are used in every participating state, with an option for participating states to include 15 additional state-specific questions that capture the local charter school facilities context. The OPSRC added 12 additional custom questions on facilities issues specific to Oklahoma. Topics addressed in the survey include the following: waiting lists and future facility plans; facility ownership and co-location; facility amenities and instructional spaces; facility condition and security; and facility funding and expenditures.

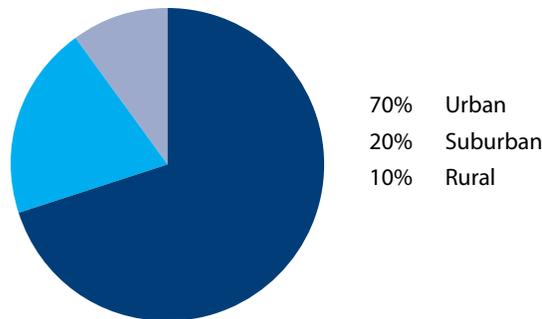
The CSFI team identified 26 brick and mortar Oklahoma charter school facilities that were eligible to participate in the survey. The survey was sent electronically to all school leaders at eligible charter schools. Survey data was collected between March and April 2018. As necessary, the OPSRC and the CSFI team provided technical assistance to schools completing the survey and each survey was reviewed for accuracy and completeness.

In addition to the data collected in the survey, the League also collected additional data on school enrollment, student demographics, and school funding from the Oklahoma Department of Education. The policy recommendations presented in the "Recommendations" section are based on the charter school facility landscape in Oklahoma, the national facility landscape, and the collective expertise of the NCSRC, the League, the OPSRC, and the National Alliance.

Description of Survey Respondents

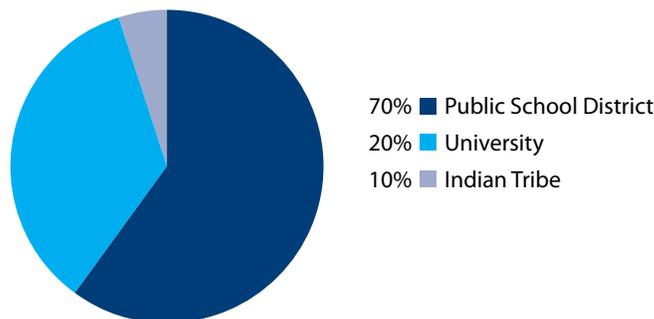
School leaders at 20 eligible charter school facilities completed the Charter School Facilities Survey. Of the schools that responded, **70 percent** of the facilities were located in an urban area, **20 percent** were in a suburban area, and **10 percent** were in a rural area.

Figure 1:
Location of Facility



Additionally, of the schools that responded to the survey, **60 percent** of these charter schools were authorized by a public school district (12/20), **35 percent** by a university (7/20), and the remaining **5 percent** by an Indian tribe (1/20).

Figure 2:
Charter School Authorizers



KEY FINDINGS

Key Finding #1: Charter school demand is high in Oklahoma and schools will need assistance with securing larger facilities to meet their growth projections.

Nationally, the demand for charter schools often exceeds the available supply,²⁷ and the demand for charter schools in Oklahoma reflects this national pattern. In Oklahoma, **80 percent** of schools (16/20) had a waitlist in 2017-18. Charter schools with a student enrollment of less than 500 had on average waitlist of 155 students and charter schools with a student enrollment equal to or greater than 500 had on average waitlist of 346 students.

While the demand for charter schools is strong in Oklahoma, facilities may limit additional charter school growth. **75 percent** of charter schools planned to increase their student enrollment over the next 5 years (15/20). On average, these schools estimated that they will enroll 352 additional students five years from now, representing a **79 percent** increase in their student enrollment. Additionally, **70 percent** of schools planned to open a new campus to support their expansion (14/20) and all charter schools that have been operating since 2005 planned to increase their student enrollment over the next five years.

Furthermore, **75 percent** of schools reported that their current facility will not be adequate for their projected enrollment 5 years from now (15/20) and these schools may need assistance with securing larger facilities to meet their growth projections. Currently, **67 percent** of these schools do not have a feasible or specific facility plan to construct or acquire adequate space for their projected enrollment (10/15). When asked what the key barriers to their growth and expansion were, **85 percent** of schools (17/20) cited either a facility challenge (11/17) or a funding challenge (6/17).

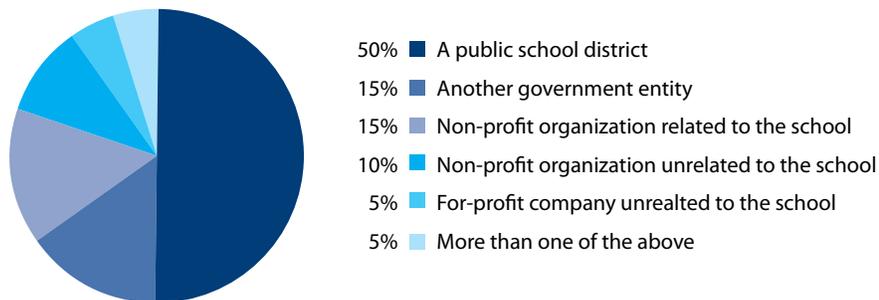
27 Pendergrass, S. (2017). Polls Find Demand For Charter Schools Continues To Exceed Supply. <https://www.publiccharters.org/latest-news/2017/11/29/polls-find-demand-charter-schools-continues-exceed-supply>

Key Finding #2: Oklahoma charter schools spent, on average, \$222 per pupil annually on facilities and this spending varied across different ownership types.

Traditional public schools operate in facilities that are owned by the school district. However, charter schools can operate in facilities that are owned by many different types of organizations, from for-profit companies to other government entities. Consistent with this trend, schools in Oklahoma operated in facilities with different types of ownership structures:

- **50 percent** of schools operated in a facility that was owned by a school district (10/20).
- **15 percent** operated in a facility owned by another government entity (3/20).
- **15 percent** operated in a facility owned by a non-profit organization related to the school (3/20).
- **10 percent** operated in a facility owned by a non-profit organization unrelated to the school (2/10).
- **5 percent** operated in a facility are owned by a for-profit organization unrelated to the school (1/20).
- The remaining **5 percent** of facilities had a mixed ownership structure and are owned by more than one of the entities listed above (1/20).

Figure 3
School Facility Ownership



36 School districts in Louisiana are referred to as parishes.

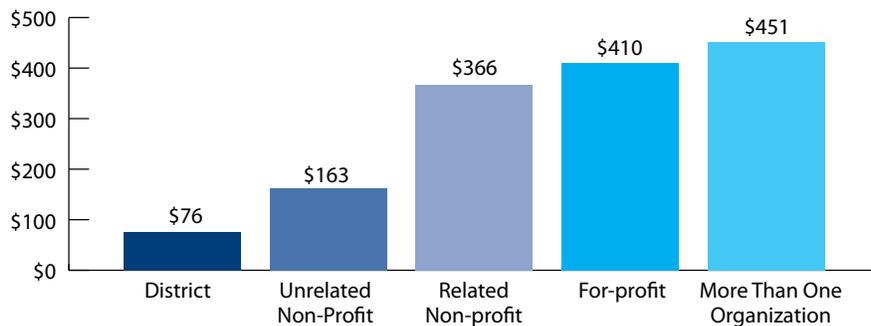
The survey found that schools that have opened within the past 6 years more frequently operate in a facility owned by a public school district compared to schools that opened more than six years ago. **86 percent** of schools that have been in operation for less than six years (6/7) occupy a facility owned by the school district. Of these six schools in district-owned facilities that have been in operation less than six years, five were authorized by a public school district, and one was authorized by a university. However, within the last four years, only schools that have been authorized by a public school district operated in a district-owned facility.

95 percent of Oklahoma charter schools (18/19) that responded had to pay rent for their facility in 2017-18. The average annual rental payment was \$184,816 in 2017-18. On average, Oklahoma charter schools that responded with their payment information reported rental payments of \$222 per pupil. Rental payments ranged from \$76 per pupil to \$451 per pupil depending on the ownership structure. On average:

- Charter schools that rented from a public school district paid **\$76 per pupil**.
- Charter schools that rented from a non-profit organization unrelated to the school paid **\$163 per pupil**.
- Charter schools that rented from a non-profit organization related to the school paid **\$366 per pupil**.
- Charter schools that rented from a for-profit organization paid **\$410 per pupil**.
- Finally, charter schools that rented facilities owned by more than one of the organizations listed above paid **\$451 per pupil**.

Of the states that have participated in CSFI, the average per pupil amount spent on rent ranged from \$328 dollars per pupil to \$2,025. This variation is dependent on the state’s facilities policies and cost of living.

Table 1
Average Facilities Rent Per Pupil by Ownership Type



In addition to the rent payment associated with the facility, **90 percent** of schools also paid for utilities (17/19). Utility payments were an additional \$84,421 per year on average per school. The average annual payment for maintenance and upkeep was \$64,847, and the average annual payment for insurance on the facility was \$39,151 in 2017-18.

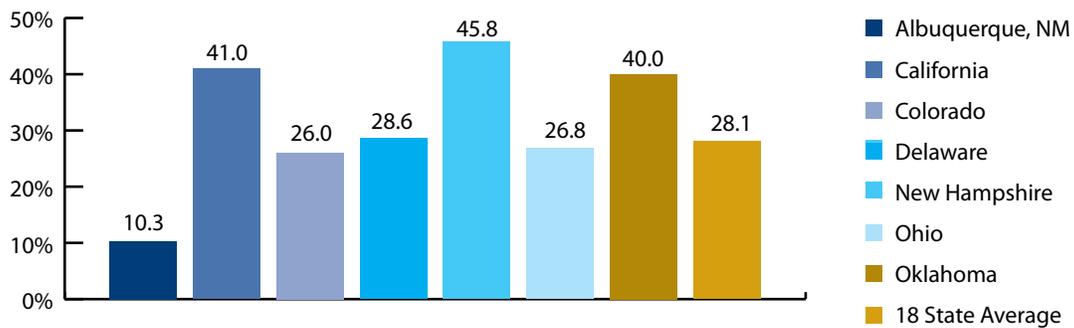
Oklahoma charter schools have undergone both major and minor capital improvement projects over the past five years. **55 percent** of schools have undergone major capital improvements (spending \$20,000 or more) over the past five years (11/20). The average total amount spent per school on major capital improvements was \$2.36 million. All the major capital improvements have been done by schools operating for at least 9 years and all the major capital improvements that have been by schools in facilities that were constructed before 1970. **70 percent** of schools reported spending money on minor capital improvement projects amount (spending less than \$20,000) over the past five years (14/20). The average total spending on minor capital improvement projects was \$86,786 per school.



Key Finding #3: Although co-location presents challenges for Oklahoma charter schools, they still would consider co-location in an underutilized district facility if given the option.

Given the scarcity of facilities or high costs of facilities, many charter schools opt to co-locate with another school or organization. In Oklahoma, **40 percent** of schools co-located with another school or organization (8/20), which is higher than the average of **28.1 percent** for the 18 other states which participated in previous CSFI surveys.

Table 2
Co-Location Percentages by State



While most of these schools co-located with either a public charter school or a traditional public school, **38 percent** of schools share their facility with organizations other than a school (3/8). However, **63 percent** of schools that co-locate reported that co-location interfered with their ability to implement their academic curriculum and education model (5/8). The survey respondents indicated that the challenges with co-location include limited or no access to space for amenities such as science labs or playgrounds, difficulty in coordination of events, and excessive noise from the surroundings.

The survey also asked respondents about the availability of vacant and underutilized public school buildings near their school. **21 percent** of schools reported that there was a vacant public school district building near the school (4/19), while **53 percent** of schools reported that there was an underutilized (**30 percent** or more underutilized space) public school district building near their school (10/19). **70 percent** of these schools would be willing to co-locate in the underutilized facility owned by the public school-district (7/10) and all schools that started operation in 2005 or later would consider co-location in an underutilized public school district facility if given the option.

Charter schools can also ask public school districts to use their underutilized or vacant district-owned facilities. In Oklahoma, **65 percent** of schools have approached a school district about using an underutilized or vacant facility (13/20). Of these, only **54 percent** were offered the use of the underutilized or vacant facility (7/13). Zero schools authorized by a university or tribe were offered the use of an underutilized or vacant facility after they approached the school district (0/4).



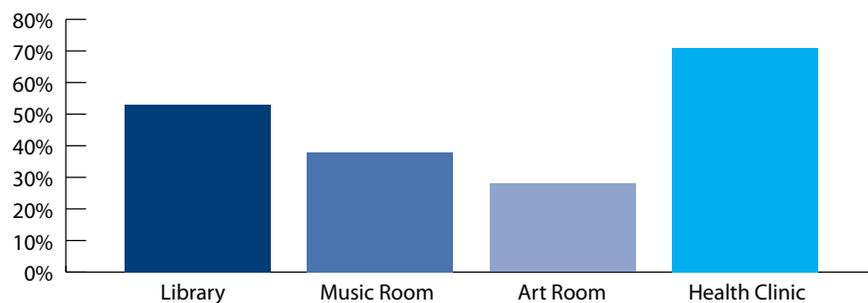
Key Finding #4: Half of Oklahoma charter schools lack the facility amenities and specialized instructional spaces they require to best implement their educational program.

Charter schools often operate in non-traditional facilities such as strip malls or churches.²⁸ However, since these non-traditional facilities were not originally constructed for educational purposes, they typically lack the instructional spaces necessary to implement certain academic curriculums and they lack amenities that are often considered standard in school district facilities, such as lunchrooms and gymnasiums.²⁹ Additionally, charter schools that operate in public school district facilities may also lack facility amenities, and the district building that they operate in may not be specifically designed to meet their instructional needs.

In Oklahoma, **50 percent** of the charter schools (10/20) reported that they do not have the amenities to best implement their educational programs. In fact, Oklahoma charter schools often did not have important instructional spaces and amenities:

- **53 percent** of schools did not have a dedicated library or media center (10/19).
- **37 percent** of schools did not have a dedicated music room (7/19).
- **26 percent** of schools did not have a dedicated art room (5/19).
- **21 percent** of schools did not have a dedicated art room or a dedicated music room (4/19).
- **68 percent** of schools did not have a dedicated health clinic (13/19).
- **11 percent** of schools did not have a dedicated lunchroom (2/19).

Table 3
Percentage of Schools Without Amenities



28 Wolfe, C. (2018). Strengthening Federal Investment in Charter School Facilities. NAPCS.

29 Cunningham, J. (2011). Charter School Facilities. National Conference of State Legislatures.

While Oklahoma charter schools lack certain amenities, the survey found that Oklahoma students did have access to science labs and computers. **100 percent** of schools serving high school students had a dedicated science lab (8/8). Furthermore, the survey revealed that **100 percent** of schools had a dedicated computer lab, issued an individual laptop or tablet to every student or provided mobile computer labs for their classroom spaces. Specifically:

- **68 percent** of schools had one or more stationary computer labs (13/19).
- **71 percent** of schools had one or more mobile computer labs (10/14).
- **30 percent** of schools issued an individual laptop or tablet to every student (6/20).
- **20 percent** of schools had facilities challenges that prevented the installation of sufficient broadband (4/20). All the schools that faced challenges with sufficient broadband were located in urban areas and were in buildings built in the 1920s-1960s.

Regarding school lunch service, the survey found that in Oklahoma, **95 percent** of schools participated in the National School Lunch program (18/19). Of these schools, **26 percent** of schools did not have a full preparatory food kitchen that meets the requirements to prepare hot meals under the federally subsidized meal program (5/19). The survey also found that all facilities owned by a school district had a full preparatory food kitchen and for facilities not owned by a school district, **50 percent** had a full preparatory food kitchen. Additionally, **16 percent** of schools did not have the dedicated space and equipment for keeping food for students warm (3/19), **11 percent** of schools did not have the dedicated space and equipment for keeping food cold (2/19), and **37 percent** of schools had lunches brought in by an outside vendor or caterer (7/19).

Oklahoma charter schools also have limited access to outdoor athletic spaces. **75 percent** of all charter schools in Oklahoma did not have their own outdoor athletic field (15/20). If schools do not own an outdoor athletic field, they can opt to pay for the use of a nearby field. In Oklahoma, **15 percent** of schools paid to use a nearby athletic field (3/20) and the average payment for using the field was \$7,667 annually.

Although Oklahoma charter schools had limited access to outdoor athletic spaces, many schools did have access to playgrounds and gymnasiums. **70 percent** of all schools had their own playground (14/20), while **100 percent** of schools that served elementary school students had their own playground (7/7). In addition, **75 percent** of schools had their own dedicated or combination gymnasium (15/20) and **25 percent** of schools paid to use a nearby gymnasium (5/20). Of the schools that paid to use a nearby gymnasium, the average payment was \$5,600 annually.

Key Finding #5: Oklahoma charter schools require additional resources to improve the safety of their facility and had facility-related concerns about the learning environment.

In today's environment, school security and safety is often a top priority for students and families. The CSFI survey asked questions related to facilities security and safety concerns to determine what security improvements need to be made. The survey found that Oklahoma charter schools have a number of important facility security systems in place:

- **77 percent** of the schools had a functioning controlled access system at the main entrance (13/17).
- **83 percent** of schools had a functioning public address system (PA system) (15/18).
- **72 percent** of schools had a functioning video surveillance system (13/18).

71 percent of Oklahoma charter schools require additional resources to improve the safety of their facility (12/17). These include:

- **55 percent** of schools did not have adequate space on the school site for drop-off and pick-up of students (11/20).
- **53 percent** of schools need additional resources to improve functioning two-way locks on all classroom doors (9/17).
- **40 percent** of schools need additional resources to improve intercoms or another means of directly communicating with the school's main office (8/20).

Schools also have concerns about the physical and learning environment. **60 percent** of school leaders reported that noise generated in other classrooms or corridors is disruptive to learning (12/20) and **55 percent** of the schools have experienced indoor air quality problems (11/20). Likewise, **55 percent** of schools did not have adequate parking for the school's needs (11/20). Furthermore, **50 percent** of the schools did not have insulated (thermal pane) glass on the majority of their windows (10/20) and **50 percent** of school leaders did not believe that classroom temperatures were reasonably comfortable throughout the school year (10/20).

CONCLUSIONS

Over the next five years, the majority of existing charter schools in Oklahoma plan to expand, and many new charter schools plan to open across the state. The survey responses indicate that **75 percent** of charter schools planned to grow over the next five years, and **75 percent** of charter schools reported that their current facility will not be large enough for their projected enrollment in five years. These schools will be looking for a facility that can hold their projected enrollment, in addition to the Oklahoma charter schools that want to expand to a new campus.

Oklahoma charter schools have a variety of options for facilities, but their costs can vary depending on the ownership of the building, which adds to the total costs of operating a school. In Oklahoma, school district facilities are the most affordable option for charter schools, but not all charter schools are able to access these facilities. The survey found that school district facilities were the least expensive option for facility rentals, costing \$76 per pupil, while charter schools that rent from for-profit organizations pay an average of \$410 per pupil. However, only half of the charters in Oklahoma operated in a facility that was owned by a school district. Additionally, within the last four years, only schools that were authorized by a school district were able to secure a school district facility for operation. Schools that were authorized by different entities, such as a university, do not appear to have the same access to school district facilities as schools that are authorized by school districts. In addition, charter schools often have to pay for utilities, insurance, and/or access to athletic fields, gyms, and other amenities, all of which increase their operating costs.

Charter schools in Oklahoma are also often paying for facilities that do not meet their needs. No charter schools in Oklahoma own their own building, and as a result, they must use existing buildings that may or may not have been designed to be a school. This suggests that there may be a need for a more robust finance market in Oklahoma, to help charter schools build their own buildings. Charter school facilities in Oklahoma often lack amenities that are standard in district facilities, and there are a number of safety and learning environment concerns. In order to have the building meet their needs, charter schools undergo both major and minor capital improvement projects, which further add to their facilities-related costs.

When asked what the key barriers to their growth and expansion were, **85 percent** schools (17/20) cited either a facility challenge (11/17) or a funding challenge (6/17) as a key barrier to their expansion. Providing equitable access to existing school district facilities and better facilities funding options would directly benefit the students attending charter schools. However, charter school growth in Oklahoma cannot rely solely upon district-owned buildings to serve their planned growth or fully supporting their programmatic needs. Charter schools may need to lease or buy facilities specifically designed to adequately support their needs in addition to gaining access to existing facilities in school districts. Additional facilities solutions should be explored in Oklahoma to help facilities gain access to affordable school district facilities and facilities funding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From a legislative priority perspective, there are several possible solutions Oklahoma may consider adopting to help mitigate these challenges:³⁰

1. Provide an incentive for districts to authorize or provide access to district owned buildings. The data indicates that district-owned buildings are the least expensive facility option for charter schools. Schools that are authorized by the district may have better access to district-owned facilities than schools that are not authorized by the district. An incentive program for districts to authorize charter schools could result in increased access to district facilities. If increased district authorization is not an option, an incentive program for districts to provide charters access to district owned buildings may also increase charter school access to affordable facilities.
2. Provide funding for the state's facilities funds and pledge the moral obligation of the state to help charter schools obtain more favorable bond financing terms. There are two funding options in Oklahoma's charter law, the Charter Schools Incentive Fund and the State Public Common School Building Equalization Fund, yet neither are currently funded by the state legislature. Providing funding for these two finance sources could help alleviate the costs schools incur for facilities. Additionally, as charter schools in Oklahoma expand and new charter schools open, having access to favorable bond financing terms will allow Oklahoma charters to build their own facilities or renovate non-traditional spaces if district or other facilities are not available.
3. Right of first refusal to purchase or lease at or below fair market value a closed, unused, or underused public school facility or property. 53 percent of schools reported that there is an underutilized public school district-owned facility near their school, and providing charter schools the right of first refusal would allow charter schools to operate in the most cost-effective facility option possible.

30 NAPCS. (2018). Charter School Database. Retrieved from <https://www.publiccharters.org/our-work/charter-law-database/states/oklahoma>

4. A requirement for districts to provide school district space or funding to charter schools if the majority of that school's students reside in that district. Currently, the majority of charter schools in Oklahoma serve students that reside within school districts. Providing charters with school district facilities or funding for schools that serve a majority of students that live in that district would help alleviate the facilities costs that charter schools incur.
5. A state loan program for charter school facilities. In 2017-18 no charter schools owned their own facilities, and a state loan program could help charter schools build facilities in areas where there are facility shortages, and allow charter schools to customize their facility to meet their instructional needs.

The results of the survey indicate that Oklahoma charter schools face challenges in obtaining equitable access to facilities and facilities funding. These recommendations listed above may help alleviate the facilities issues of access and affordability, and allow Oklahoma charters to widen programming options, optimize educational experiences, and increase the number of available quality seats to satisfy unmet demand.

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Charter School Facilities Initiative: An Analysis of the Charter School Facility Landscape in Oklahoma was prepared by the National Charter School Resource Center, the Colorado League of Charter Schools, and the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools on behalf of the Oklahoma Public Schools Resource Center.

Please visit the Charter School Facilities Initiative website at facilitiesinitiative.org to obtain additional state reports, additional information on data presented in this report, or for general charter school facilities questions.