

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CHARTER SCHOOL FACILITY LANDSCAPE IN ARKANSAS

OCTOBER 2013



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE ARKANSAS PUBLIC SCHOOL RESOURCE CENTER, the Colorado League of Charter Schools, and the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools publish this report, entitled “*An Analysis of the Charter School Facility Landscape in Arkansas*,” detailing the status of charter school facilities in the state.

In Spring of 2013, the above organizations worked to collect evidence that would accurately portray both the degree to which Arkansas open enrollment charter school facilities¹ were sufficient² and the average amount of operating funds spent on facilities. Collectively, the results described in this report provide evidence that open enrollment charter school students in Arkansas do not have access to the same facilities and facilities-related special program amenities compared to traditional public school students in the state.

In order to ensure that the policy recommendations of this report are research-based and supported by reliable data, Cuningham Group Architecture, Inc.—a leader in educational facilities architecture—consulted on the project to provide a set of reasonable expectations for school facilities’ size and amenities (see Appendix B for detailed description). The Colorado League of Charter Schools (“the League”) is the pioneering organization behind the creation and development of the Charter School Facilities Survey. The League worked closely with the Arkansas Public School Resource Center to collect the data used to produce this report. A set of recommendations for ways in which Arkansas could address any facilities-related issues is provided by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.

Given the alignment of the Facilities Initiative and the goals and data needs of the U.S. Department of Education’s (ED) Charter Schools Program (CSP), ED procured additional state surveys, including Arkansas. The National Charter School Resource Center at American Institutes for Research (AIR) [1] has been subcontracting with the Colorado League of Charter Schools to collect the research and data on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education since October of 2011. To date, AIR has subcontracted for the data collection and research of charter school facilities in seven states: Arkansas, Idaho, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and South Carolina.

This report is based on facilities survey and measurement data plus enrollment and operating revenue data collected for the 2012-2013 school year³. The results presented in this report are based on data from 100 percent of Arkansas brick and mortar charter schools⁴.

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- 1 Arkansas law defines an open enrollment charter school as a public school operating under the terms granted by the authorizer, and which may draw its students from any public school district in the state. For purposes of this report, “charter school” will be used interchangeably with “open enrollment charter.”
 - 2 “Sufficient,” in terms of school facilities, was derived from local, regional and national school construction data as well as best practices in new charter school construction.
 - 3 Enrollment and per-pupil state foundation funding were obtained from the Arkansas Public School Resource Center and the Arkansas Department of Education.



The standards cited throughout this report were derived by averaging local standards⁵ and new construction practices from several sources including published regional and national new school construction data found in the School Planning and Management's Annual School Construction Reports for 2001 through 2012⁶.

Key findings include:

1. Arkansas's open enrollment charter schools spend per-pupil education and operating dollars on facilities, and do not have access to additional state and local facility funding.

- The average Arkansas charter school spends \$782 per pupil out of the school's annual operating budget on its facility, though this can vary depending on the charter's facility arrangement. For example:
 - Charters renting from private entities pay an average of \$864 per pupil (14 percent), annually.
 - Charter schools that own their facility pay an average of \$680 per pupil (11 percent), annually.
 - Charter schools renting from another, non-district, governmental entity pay an average of \$176 per pupil (three percent), annually.

4 Arkansas has one online school; it was not included in these survey results as standards for those facilities have not yet been explored.

5 Guidelines presented in the Commission for Arkansas Public School Academic Facilities and Transportation Rules Governing the Academic Facilities Partnership Program were also incorporated into the standards used in this study.

6 See School Planning and Management's Annual School Construction Reports for the years 2001-2012 at (<http://www.peterli.com/spm/resources/rptsspm.shtm>).

2. Charter school facilities in Arkansas are smaller than prescribed standards.

- **90 percent** of Arkansas charter school facilities are at least 20 percent smaller than the grade level standards.
- **95 percent** of Arkansas charter schools are on sites that are at least 20 percent smaller than grade level standards.
- **Only 25 percent** of charter school general education K-12 classrooms meet grade level standards, with fewer than five percent of early childhood education and kindergarten classrooms meeting the grade level standards.

3. Few Arkansas public charter schools have access to underutilized or vacant district facilities.

- **63 percent** of respondents reported that there is an empty traditional public school (TPS) building near the charter school.
- **Five charter schools** with empty TPS buildings nearby reported that they have asked the district for the use of that empty school facility.
- To date, **no charter schools** have been granted access to an empty district owned building.

4. Many Arkansas charter schools lack full-preparatory kitchen facilities that qualify for participation in the National School Lunch Program.

- **Sixty-eight percent** of Arkansas charter schools do not have a full-preparatory, federally-compliant food kitchen; however,
- **Almost 70 percent** of those have the capability of keeping food warm, typically food provided by catering companies.

5. Physical education and recreational options are limited for Arkansas charter school students.

- **Over 60 percent** of Arkansas charter schools do not have a gymnasium on campus.
- **Nearly 90 percent** of Arkansas charter schools reported that their facility does not have a play/athletic field or access to one nearby.

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INTRODUCTION

Charter School Facilities Initiative Background

In the summer of 2007, the Colorado League of Charter Schools (“the League”) launched its Facilities 2010 Task Force. The Task Force was established to identify prominent shortcomings in the charter school capital landscape and to develop a blueprint of public policy and private sector changes leading to a comprehensive, long-range system of sufficient public charter school facilities or facility funding sources that are accessible to charter schools. At the direction of the Task Force, the League developed a comprehensive Charter School Facilities Survey in partnership with a national leader in school facilities, Paul Hutton, AIA, of Cuningham Group Architecture, Inc., and local experts in school planning, Wayne Eckerling, Ph.D., and Allen Balczarek.

In April 2008, the first report outlining the results of the Colorado survey was published. As a result of that report, the League was able to successfully obtain more capital construction funds for charter schools, make legislative changes that required school districts to include district-authorized charter schools in bond election discussions, and provide for the inclusion of charter schools as eligible applicants in the Colorado Building Excellent Schools Today (BEST) program, a competitive grant program that provides funding to school districts and charter schools for capital construction projects.

Charter School Facilities Initiative Partnership

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (“the Alliance”), upon noting the success of the Colorado facilities initiative, partnered with the League to use the Colorado facilities survey model in other states to assess the charter facilities landscape across the country. In 2010-2011 the League worked with the charter support organizations (“CSO”) in Georgia, Indiana, and Texas to pilot the initiative across multiple states simultaneously. Following the success of this multi-state initiative, data collection began in late 2011 in New York and Tennessee in conjunction with the state CSOs.

Given the alignment of the Facilities Initiative and the goals and data needs of the U.S. Department of Education’s (ED) Charter Schools Program (CSP), ED procured additional state surveys, including Arkansas, which began in the spring of 2013. The National Charter School Resource Center at American Institutes for Research (AIR) [1] has subcontracted for the data collection and research of charter school facilities in seven states: Arkansas, Idaho, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and South Carolina.

In 2013, the League worked in conjunction with the Arkansas Public School Resource Center (“Resource Center”) to collect and analyze the data used to produce this report. All charter schools in Arkansas were asked to complete the Charter School Facilities Survey and to allow a Resource Center representative to conduct an on-site measurement of the facility and educational spaces. The results presented in this report are based on data from all 19 of Arkansas’s brick and mortar charter school facilities⁷, which completed all or part of the comprehensive facility survey. While financial data was collected from the one online Arkansas charter school, that data is not included in this report.

Charter Schools in Arkansas

Arkansas’s charter law was passed in 1999, and the first two charter schools opened in Arkansas in 2001. In the 2012-2013 school year, 17 open enrollment charter schools (including 19 campuses) and one online charter school, collectively serving almost 8,000 students (or 1.7 percent of Arkansas’s K-12 enrollment), operate throughout Arkansas. In 2012-13, 51 percent of Arkansas’s charter school students were eligible for free or reduced price meals, and 59 percent belonged to at least one ethnic minority group.

The Arkansas Department of Education is the primary authorizer of open enrollment charter schools in the state, with the Arkansas State Board of Education possessing a discretionary right of review. Arkansas school districts may also apply to the State Charter Authorizer to “convert” a school into a charter school. This type of charter school⁸, called a district conversion charter school, remains part of a school district. As conversion charter schools continue to receive the same resources and supports from the school district, only the open enrollment charter schools were included in this study.

Management organizations run 37 percent of the open enrollment charter schools in Arkansas. Forty-seven percent of Arkansas charter schools are located in urban areas, 47 percent are in suburban areas, and five percent are in rural areas.

7 The number of facilities differs from the number of charter schools, as some charter schools operate more than one facility.

8 There are 18 conversion charter schools in Arkansas.

Charter School Facilities in Arkansas

Arkansas open enrollment charter school operators regularly report in the Arkansas Public School Resource Center's ("Resource Center") needs surveys that facilities funding is the single largest challenge in starting and sustaining a public charter school. Charter schools spend a greater share of per-pupil state foundation funding (SFF) (i.e. education/operational dollars) to cover the costs of their facilities, whether paying on debt service, rent, or a mortgage. Traditional Arkansas public schools have access to additional state facility funding and local tax dollars in excess of the uniform tax rate, in addition to the per-pupil SFF. Because Arkansas charter schools receive no direct facilities funding, this results in a drop in the remaining per-pupil SFF available for educational expenses (e.g. purchase of curricular materials, paying educator salaries).

To get a sense of the amount charter schools are paying for facilities, the Resource Center partnered with the League to participate in the Charter School Facilities Initiative (CSFI). Following the Colorado facility survey's model, all Arkansas charter schools were asked to complete an extensive and thorough survey about their facilities (see Appendix A for a detailed description of the survey). The Resource Center led this data collection effort and provided supplemental data on school enrollment, student demographics, and funding. The survey and measurement data was collected during May and June, 2013.

The standards cited throughout this report were derived from published regional and national new school construction data found in the School Planning and Management's Annual School Construction Reports for the years 2001-2012 (see <http://www.peterli.com/spm/resources/rptsspm.shtml>). Guidelines presented in the Commission for Arkansas Public School Academic Facilities and Transportation Rules Governing the Academic Facilities Partnership Program were also incorporated into the standards used in this study.

Judgment based on professional experience with charter and traditional public school design is also factored into these standards (see Appendix B). To ensure accuracy in data collection and interpretation, the League consulted with two industry experts: Paul Hutton, an architect and a leader in school facilities design and planning, and Wayne Eckerling, Ph.D., an expert on charter schools, facilities planning, research, and bond planning and implementation.

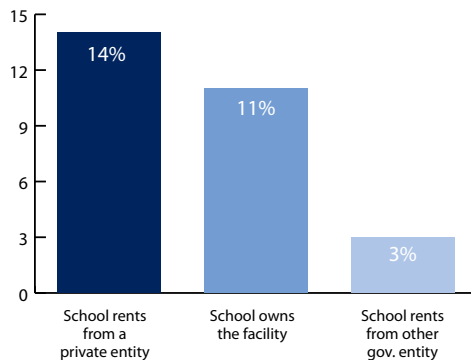
KEY FINDINGS

Key Finding #1: Arkansas’s open enrollment charter schools spend per-pupil education and operating dollars on facilities, and do not have access to additional state and local facility funding.

The 2012-2013 base-level per student state foundation funding (SFF) for all public schools in Arkansas, including charter schools, was \$6,267. On average, Arkansas public charter schools spend \$782 dollars per pupil, or 12.5 percent, from per-pupil SFF on facilities⁹. However, the amounts being spent vary widely, depending on the type of entity that owns the facility: the school, a governmental entity other than a school district (e.g. city- or county-owned), or a private entity (e.g. non-profit organization, a for-profit organization).

- Charters renting from private entities (63 percent) pay an average of \$864 per pupil (14 percent), annually.
- Charter schools that own their facility (10.5 percent) pay an average of \$680 per pupil (11 percent), annually.
- Charter schools renting from another (non-district) governmental entity¹⁰ (10.5 percent) pay an average of \$176 per pupil (3 percent), annually.

Figure 1
Percent of Per-Pupil Operating Budget Spent on Facilities by Facilities Arrangement



Note: Two facilities were not included in this analysis due to mixed ownership type.

In addition to rent or mortgage payments, 79 percent of Arkansas charter schools have undertaken a major capital project in the last five years (defined as projects over \$20,000), for a total of over \$32 million spent on renovations, major repairs, additions to existing facilities, new land or building purchases, or construction of a new facility, with an average of almost \$2.2 million spent per school. Over one-third of those schools (38 percent) utilized per-pupil state foundation funding and reserve funds generated from state foundation funding to pay for these capital projects – for a total of \$4.8 million (15 percent of all capital project funding).

Sixteen percent of Arkansas charter schools report that they are saving current per-pupil SFF operating revenue for future capital projects.

9 In this analysis, facilities costs do not include maintenance fees, utilities costs, or any other assessed fees by the districts, as those are paid by both traditional and charter public schools.

10 Non-district governmental entities could include facilities owned by a county or a city, or some other municipality.

Key Finding #2: Charter school facilities in Arkansas are smaller than prescribed standards.

Results from the survey found that Arkansas charter school buildings and classrooms are considerably smaller than the standards used for this study (see Appendix B).

- **Almost 90 percent** of Arkansas charter school facilities are at least 20 percent smaller than the grade level standards.
- **95 percent** of Arkansas charter schools are on sites that are at least 20 percent smaller than grade level standards.
- **Only 25 percent** of charter school general education K-12 classrooms meet grade level standards and fewer than five percent of early childhood education and kindergarten classrooms meet the grade level standards.

When total facility size is too small, charter schools are challenged to provide the same quality instructional spaces that are available to other public school students; such as a library, computer labs, or a space exclusively used for a gymnasium or lunch rooms.



Charter school facilities in Arkansas are smaller than prescribed standards.

Key Finding #3: Few Arkansas public charter schools have access to underutilized or vacant district facilities.

Charter schools are challenged to find suitable facilities when districts do not allow access to underutilized or vacant facilities and charter schools end up using funds from their per-pupil SFF operating revenues to pay for their capital needs (see Key Finding #1 for total amount spent within the past five years). These additional facility costs further dilute the per-pupil operating revenue charter schools have available for instruction.

- **Sixty-three percent** of respondents reported that there is an empty traditional public school (TPS) building near the charter school.
- **Five charter schools** have approached their districts requesting the use of nearby vacant TPS facilities.
- **No charter schools** were granted use of vacant TPS facilities, with half being told the district had plans for future use or given no explanation at all.¹¹
 - Similar results were experienced by charter schools seeking use of TPS district-controlled unused land or underutilized facilities (30 percent or more unused capacity) near their charter school facilities.
 - **Sixty-eight percent** of respondents either strongly disagreed or disagreed that “information about unused or underutilized space is readily available.” Seventy-three percent strongly disagreed or disagreed that “the selection of schools that are given the opportunity to use underutilized space for co-location is fair and transparent.”



11 The other two schools that were denied the use of an empty or underutilized facility were told that the district “had plans for future use or possible use as a school.”

Key Finding #4: Many Arkansas charter schools lack full-preparatory kitchen facilities that qualify for participation in the National School Lunch Program.

Sixty-three percent of the typical Arkansas charter school's students qualify for free and reduced price meals. Yet, a majority of Arkansas charter schools do not have a full-preparatory, federally-qualified food kitchen in which to prepare hot meals.

- **Sixty-eight percent** of Arkansas charter schools do not have a full-preparatory, federally-compliant food kitchen in which to prepare hot meals and that qualifies for federal free and reduced price meal reimbursement.
- **Almost 70 percent** of Arkansas charter schools have the capability of keeping food for students warm. This is typically food purchased from outside vendors that has been prepared at another location, often at costs far in excess of the federally-subsidized rates. Charter schools must find a way to cover that extra cost. Sometimes this is done by fundraising, but often the excess cost comes out of per-pupil operating revenue.

Key Finding #5: Physical education and recreational options are limited for Arkansas charter school students.

Although the majority of Arkansas charter schools have playgrounds for elementary students (86 percent), most Arkansas charter schools report that their facility does not have a gymnasium or a play/athletic field, nor access to one nearby. The lack of these amenities, often a "standard" in traditional public schools, limits the opportunity to participate in physical education and organized athletic activities for Arkansas charter school students.

- **Over 60 percent** of Arkansas charter schools do not have a gymnasium on campus.
- Of those schools that do have a gym, **less than 30 percent** of those gyms are dedicated gyms. The remaining schools have some kind of shared space (e.g., a gym/lunchroom combination).
- **Nearly 90 percent** of Arkansas charter schools reported that their facility does not have a play/athletic field or access to one nearby.

ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE AND FINDINGS

Specialized Instructional Spaces

Most instruction during the school day takes place in generic classrooms; however, specialized instructional spaces such as science labs, libraries, and music rooms are an important part of a comprehensive educational program. Arkansas charter schools have a limited number of these types of spaces, and, even when present, the spaces frequently do not meet the accepted standards¹².

The standards cited throughout this report were derived from published regional and national new school construction data. However, judgment based on the professional experience with charter and public school design of the architecture firm that the League consults with is also factored into these standards (see Appendix B for more information).

- **53 percent** of Arkansas charter schools have no dedicated library space or access to a nearby library.
- **32 percent** of Arkansas charter schools have no dedicated art room.
- **47 percent** of Arkansas charter schools have no dedicated music room.
- **32 percent** of Arkansas charter schools have neither a dedicated art room nor a dedicated music room.
- **38 percent** of Arkansas secondary charter schools have no dedicated gymnasium.



12 The standards cited throughout this report were derived from published regional and national new school construction data. Judgment based on professional experience with charter and public school design is also factored into these standards (see Appendix B).

School Environment

Recent studies conducted by Uline and Tschannen-Moran,¹³ Tanner,¹⁴ and Durán-Narucki¹⁵ demonstrate a link between the quality of the physical environment within a school facility and students' educational outcomes. Facility characteristics that are believed to have an impact on student learning are: acoustics, windows, natural day light, thermal comfort, and indoor air quality. The facilities survey asked Arkansas charter school leaders to rate their schools on these aspects. Selected relevant findings follow:

- Building deterioration is one area that Arkansas charter administrators often report as a problem with their school site:
 - In the last three years, **three Arkansas charter schools** have been forced to close their doors for three or more days due to facilities-related issues (such as broken pipes, furnace repair, or air quality issues).
 - **47 percent** of charter school leaders disagreed with the statement, "[t]he roof leaks rarely, if ever."
 - **58 percent** also disagreed that "[t]he site does not exhibit regular drainage problems such as standing water."
 - **42 percent** disagreed that "[t]he site is free of hazards like large cracks in the pavement or sidewalks and uneven ground."
- **Almost 70 percent** of Arkansas charter school administrators indicated the lack of operational windows or insulated glass (thermal pane).
 - **74 percent** disagreed with the statement that "[m]ost classrooms/instructional spaces have enough natural day-lighting, sufficient to occasionally turn off electric lights."
 - **37 percent** disagreed that "[m]ost classrooms/instructional spaces have windows permitting views of the outside."
- **Almost 60 percent** of charter school administrators reported that noise from other classrooms or corridors was a disruption to instruction inside the general classrooms.
- **At least 30 percent** of charter school administrators stated their school experienced air quality problems due to mold or mildew.

13 Cynthia Uline, Megan Tschannen-Moran, (2008) "The walls speak: the interplay of quality facilities, school climate, and student achievement," *Journal of Educational Administration*, Vol. 46 Iss: 1, pp.55 – 73.

14 C. Kenneth Tanner, (2009) "Effects of school design on student outcomes," *Journal of Educational Administration*, Vol. 47 Iss: 3, pp.381 – 399.

15 Valkiria Durán-Narucki (2008). "School building condition, school attendance, and academic achievement in New York City public schools: A mediation model." *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, Vol 28 Iss: 3, pp.278 – 286.

- **Over a third** of charter school administrators disagreed with the statements that “[t]he temperature in the **classrooms** is reasonably comfortable throughout the school year” and [t]he temperature throughout the **building** is reasonably comfortable throughout the school year.”
- **42 percent** of Arkansas charter schools have facilities that require students to cross a street to access one or more of the following: playgrounds, play/athletic field, gymnasium, or library.
- **42 percent** of Arkansas charters are in facilities constructed prior to 1970, and 26 percent are in facilities that have at least one temporary building.

Charter schools in Arkansas face a dual challenge as they look to the future; while there is high demand for charters to expand, there are not enough resources to support the expansion.

The typical (median) Arkansas charter school had a wait list of 92 students. Statewide, student demand for charter school enrollment exceeds the supply with a total wait list of almost 8,000 students at the time survey data was collected. In addition, 74 percent of Arkansas charter schools reported plans to grow over the next five years, potentially adding up to 2,724 additional students across the state. However, 79 percent of those schools planning for growth indicated that their current facility does not have adequate space to accommodate the additional enrollment. Over half of those schools have a specific plan to construct or acquire adequate space for the desired enrollment in five years.

Therefore, additional financial requirements for construction and/or acquisition of additional space, along with the costs of maintaining aging facilities will just worsen the additional burden of facilities costs for Arkansas charter schools. Almost 90 percent of Arkansas charter schools would participate in the newly-created State Charter Schools Facilities Funding program, with the typical school indicating it would apply for \$500,000.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Arkansas public charter schools currently serve about two percent of the state's public school students, and are poised to serve an even larger percentage in the coming years. The Facilities Survey shows that 74 percent of Arkansas's public charter schools plan to increase their enrollment over the next five years.

The provision of equitable facilities funding, including access to state facility grant and loan programs and better access to vacant school district buildings, would allow public charter schools to allocate more operational dollars toward core educational concerns and enhance their ability to provide a well-rounded educational experience for Arkansas's public charter school students.

Based on experiences in other states, there is no one simple way to resolve the facilities challenges that charter schools face. A report by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, *A New Model Law for Supporting the Growth of High-Quality Public Charter Schools*, provides a menu of eight solutions that Arkansas may consider adopting to help mitigate these challenges:

- 1. A per-pupil facilities allowance that annually reflects actual average district capital costs.**
- 2. A state grant program for charter school facilities.**
- 3. A state loan program for charter school facilities.**
- 4. Equal access to tax-exempt bonding authorities or allowing charters to have their own bonding authority.**
- 5. A mechanism to provide credit enhancement for charter schools.**
- 6. Equal access to existing facilities funding programs available to traditional public schools.**
- 7. Right of refusal to purchase or lease at or below fair market value a closed, unused, or underused public school facility or property.**
- 8. Prohibition of facility related requirements that are stricter than those applied to traditional public schools.**

Not all of these solutions are equal in their importance. The most important solutions are those that provide revenue directly to public charter schools for their facilities expenses. Points #1, #2, and #6 above provide facility revenue options for Arkansas to consider. While not as critical as revenue, the other policy solutions listed above (#3, #4, #5, #7, and #8) may prove helpful to Arkansas charter schools and should also be seriously considered. It is important to note that the states that have helped public charter schools the most with their facilities challenges have enacted both revenue policies and non-revenue policies.

Arkansas currently provides little facilities support to public charter schools. According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools' *Measuring Up to the Model: A Ranking of State Charter School Laws* (which analyzes and ranks each state public charter school law against the model law), Arkansas law only addresses three of the eight facilities components in the model law:

- In 2013, the Arkansas legislature passed a law to create an Open Enrollment Public Charter School Capital Grant Program. However, the state has not provided funding to this program.
- New Arkansas law established the Open enrollment Charter School Facilities Loan Fund, which allows open enrollment public charter schools to borrow money from the state for facilities purposes, including credit enhancement for financing academic facility projects. Unfortunately, this too is under threat of going unfunded.
- Beginning in 2007, Arkansas law gives open enrollment charter schools the first right of refusal to purchase or lease at fair market value a closed public school or unused portions of a public school located in a district from which it draws students. It also provides that a district may not require lease payments that exceed the fair market value of a property, and that a district is not required to lease to an open enrollment charter school if an offer higher than fair market value is offered by an entity other than the charter school through a competitive bid process.

Arkansas could better support the likely growth of its public charter school sector over the next few years by helping charters with their facilities challenges in the following ways:

- **Provide direct funding to public charter schools for their facilities costs:** One option is to provide a per-pupil facilities allowance that annually reflects actual average district capital costs. For example, Tennessee provides a per-pupil facilities allotment to charter schools. The exact amount of the allotment varies by the district in which a charter school is located. Currently, the allotment is between approximately \$215 and \$315 per pupil. A second option is to fund an open enrollment public charter school capital grant program. For example, Indiana law established the charter school facilities assistance program to make grants and loans to public charter schools for the purpose of constructing, purchasing, renovating, maintaining, and paying first semester costs for new facilities projects, and reducing common school fund debt for public charter schools. Indiana provided \$17 million to this program in 2011.
- **Provide funding to the open enrollment public charter school facilities loan fund:** Arkansas law creates an open enrollment public charter school facilities loan fund. To date, this program has not received any funding. Utah law provides a charter school revolving loan fund that provides loans to public charter schools for the costs of constructing, renovating, and purchasing public charter school facilities. This fund is capitalized at \$6,000,000. Washington D.C. also has such a fund which is currently capitalized at over \$30,000,000.

- **Improve access to surplus district and other public space:** Arkansas requires school districts to give charter schools the first right of refusal to purchase or lease vacant and unused buildings at a price not to exceed the fair market value of the property. This policy should be strengthened. Indiana law, for example, requires school districts to provide a list of buildings that are closed, unused, or unoccupied to the state department of education and make them available for lease or purchase to any charter school. If a charter school wishes to use a school building on the list, the school district must lease the building for \$1 a year for a term at the charter school's discretion or sell the building for \$1.

The results of the 2013 Arkansas Charter School Facilities Study indicate that Arkansas charter schools face challenges in obtaining equitable access to facilities and facilities financing. By ensuring equitable access for all Arkansas public schools, charter schools could widen programming options, increase the quality of the educational experiences, and increase the number of available seats.



APPENDIX A

Methodology

Questionnaire Development

A critical first step to gathering the best possible set of objective data and information about charter school facilities and facility needs was to develop a comprehensive questionnaire.

To accomplish this, the Colorado League of Charter Schools (“the League”) commissioned Cuningham Group Architecture, Inc. The firm’s principal architect, Paul Hutton, AIA, has designed a variety of schools and is known for his creative, cost-effective, and environmentally conscious facilities. Hutton has designed numerous new charter schools and charter school additions. Wayne Eckerling, Ph.D., a former assistant superintendent with the Denver Public Schools with responsibilities for supervision of charter schools, educational planning, and research, was also selected to assist in the design of the survey and analysis of the data. In addition to his public school facilities expertise, Dr. Eckerling has experience with general obligation bond planning and implementation.

The draft questionnaire was reviewed by the League’s facility task force, League staff, and others with expertise in school construction and educational policy. A draft questionnaire was then field tested with a small group of charter schools to ensure clarity and comprehensiveness of the items. Further revisions to the questionnaire were made based on the feedback from all participating Colorado schools and survey results. The revised base survey and state-specific questions were then administered in Georgia, Indiana and Texas. Extensive feedback was solicited from these states’ Charter Support Organizations and schools, resulting in further revisions to the Colorado League of Charter Schools’ base survey.

Topics addressed include the following:

- Demographic information including grades served, year of inception, and number of students on the waiting list.
- Future facility plans.
- Shared use information.
- Facility information including year of construction and site size.
- Facility ownership, financing, and annual payments.
- Facility and classroom size and information technology resources.
- Facility amenities such as gymnasiums, lunch rooms, libraries, and playgrounds.
- Facility adequacy, condition, and maintainability.
- Facility funding.

The questionnaire includes more than 145 items with some requiring multiple responses.

Arkansas Survey Procedures

The League's base questionnaire was revised to address Arkansas-specific issues through a collaborative effort of the Arkansas Public School Resource Center ("Resource Center"), the League, Mr. Hutton, and Dr. Eckerling. To ensure both timely and accurate responses, the Resource Center and their consultants assisted schools with completing the questionnaires. Submitted questionnaires were reviewed again for accuracy and completeness. Follow-up was done with the schools as necessary. While the completed questionnaires are the primary source of information for this study, information was procured by the Resource Center from the Arkansas Department of Education and was used to provide data on pupil membership, per-pupil funding and free and reduced price lunch eligibility.

APPENDIX B

School Facility Standards

This section provides information about the standards used in this report. The standards cited throughout this report were derived from published regional and national new school construction data found in the School Planning and Management's Annual School Construction Reports for the years 2001-2012 (see <http://www.peterli.com/spm/resources/rptsspm.shtm>). Guidelines presented in the Commission for Arkansas Public School Academic Facilities and Transportation Rules Governing the Academic Facilities Partnership Program were also incorporated into the standards used in this study, forming a composite standard. Judgment based on professional experience with charter and public school design is also factored into the standards as are site, facility and classroom standards used in a number of states. The standards are intended to be neither excessively generous in allocating space nor unnecessarily limiting to charter school opportunities.

Gross square footage standards were based first on published regional and national new school construction data and comparable local facility data for gross building square footage¹⁶. This data is typically based on enrollments that average between 600 and 1200 students. Since many charter schools may not reach these levels of enrollment even when their program capacity is realized and a few may even exceed these enrollments, the standards were extended to account for a much broader range of enrollments while at the same time taking into account minimum sizes necessary for a base level of educational adequacy. When available, standards were also compared to state and/or district standards to verify validity. Standards for schools with enrollments of 200, 500, and 800 students are shown in Table 1.

	200 Students	500 Students	800 Students
Grades K-5	157	135	113
Grades K-8	160	144	128
Grades 6-8	169	159	150
Grades 6-12	178	172	165
Grades 9-12	188	182	176
Grades K-12	166	156	146

16 National and regional data were acquired from the School Planning & Management's (2001-2012, individually) Annual School Construction Reports. Local data was acquired through district building and planning reports.

Site standards were derived from the gross square footage standards described above by taking into account the fairly consistent relationship between building and site size. Again, particularly for smaller enrollments, educational adequacy was also taken into account. Again, derived standards were then compared to those used in other states and districts, including a representative sample of urban, suburban, and rural school districts, to ensure their validity. Site size standards are shown in Table 2 for three different enrollment levels.

Table 2. School Site Standards (acres)			
	200 Students	500 Students	800 Students
Grades K-5	4.50	9.50	9.50
Grades K-8	5.00	11.25	11.25
Grades 6-8	4.50	10.75	10.75
Grades 6-12	4.75	11.75	11.75
Grades 9-12	5.25	12.50	12.50
Grades K-12	5.00	11.75	11.75

General classroom standards are shown in Table 3. These standards were derived from standards used in other states and districts as well as best practice based on professional experience with charter and public school design. Adjustments were made for Montessori and Expeditionary Learning programs to reflect that larger classrooms are required to implement these educational programs.

Table 3. General Classroom Standards (square feet per student)	
Grade K	46
Grades 1-5	33
Grades 6-8	30
Grades 9-12	28

Standards for specialized instructional spaces like libraries, computer rooms, science labs, art rooms, music rooms, special education classrooms, gymnasiums, and lunch rooms also were developed based on a review of state and district standards as well as best practices in school design. Many of the standards below are based on formulas to accommodate the potential for smaller or larger enrollments, as previously outlined, and then take into consideration educational adequacy. Some of these standards are shown below. Lunch room standards assume three lunch periods.

Table 4. Specialized Instructional Spaces			
	Elementary	Middle	High
Gymnasium	3,000 SQ FT	5,400 SQ FT	7,300 SQ FT
Science Lab/Class	42 SQ FT / Student	46 SQ FT / Student	50 SQ FT / Student
Art	40 SQ FT / Student	42 SQ FT / Student	48 SQ FT / Student
Library	SQ FT = 500 + (2.5 * enrollment)		
Lunch Room	SQ FT = 1/3 * enrollment		SQ FT = 1/3 * enrollment

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on behalf of the Arkansas Public School Resource Center.