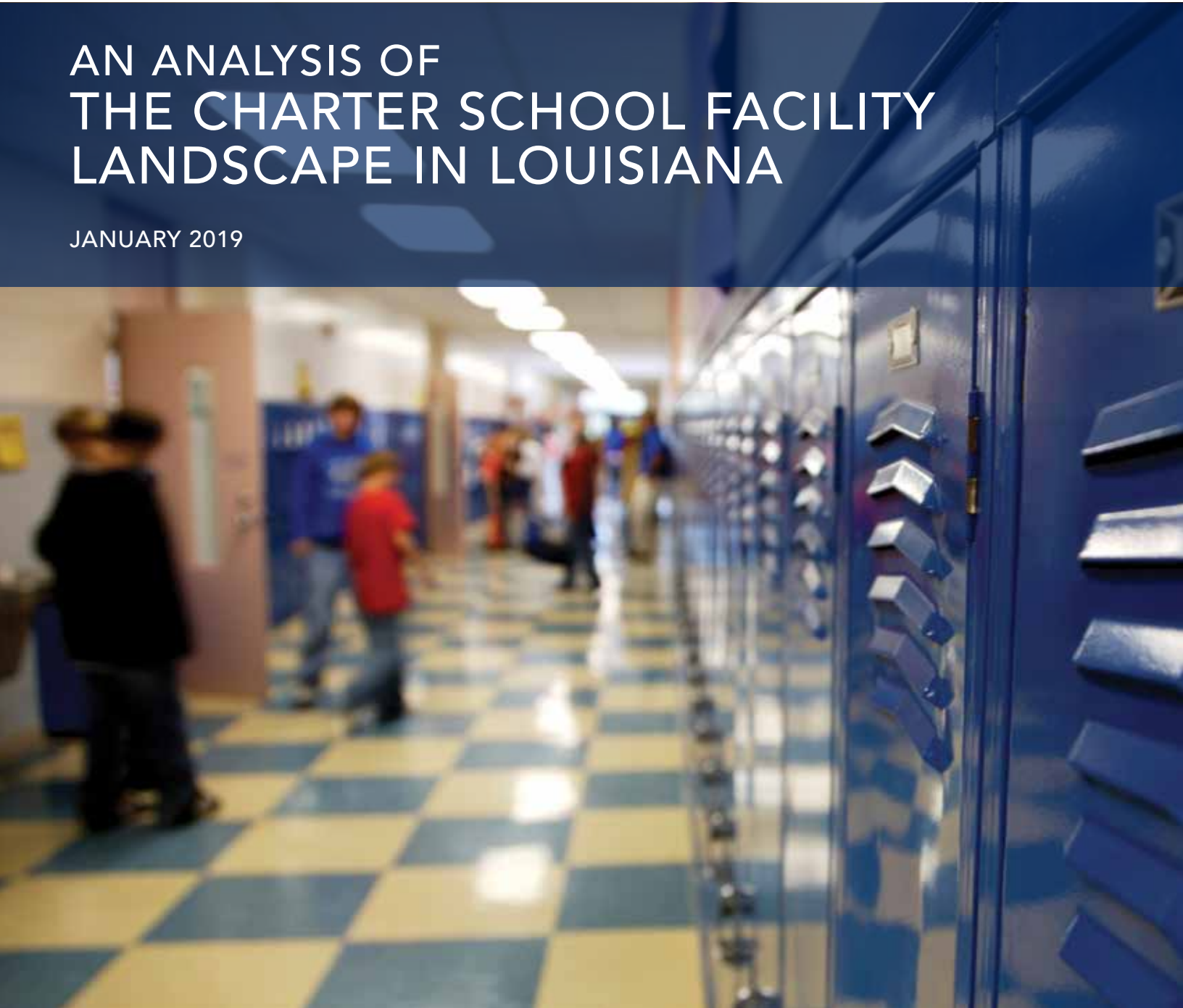


# AN ANALYSIS OF THE CHARTER SCHOOL FACILITY LANDSCAPE IN LOUISIANA

JANUARY 2019



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the spring of 2018, the **NATIONAL CHARTER SCHOOL RESOURCE CENTER (NCSRC)**, the Colorado League of Charter Schools (the League), the Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools (LAPCS), 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 Louisiana. The data collection in Louisiana 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 Louisiana for the 2017-18 school year.





### Key findings include:

#### 1. Charter schools in the Orleans Parish operate more frequently in district facilities than charter schools outside of the Orleans Parish.

- In the Orleans Parish, **81.7 percent** of schools operated in a facility owned by the school district, while in Non-Orleans parishes, only **27.5 percent** of schools operated in a facility owned by the school district.

#### 2. Charter schools that operate in district facilities pay less for rent than schools that operate in facilities owned by other types of organizations.

- In 2017-18, the average charter school in Louisiana spent **\$276 per pupil** on rent or **1.9 percent** of per pupil funding.
- Charter schools that rented their facility from a public school district paid **\$70 per pupil** or **0.5 percent** of per pupil funding.
- Charter schools that rented their facility from a for-profit organization unrelated to the school paid **\$941 per pupil** or **6.9 percent** of per pupil funding.

**3. Many Louisiana charter schools lack the technology, facility amenities, and specialized instructional spaces they require to best implement their educational program.**

- **17.6 percent** of schools did not have sufficient internet, WAN, LAN, and Wi-Fi infrastructure for their current and future testing, learning, and administrative bandwidth needs (18/102).
- In Louisiana, **38.2 percent** of schools (39/102) reported to not have the necessary amenities to best implement their educational program.
- Additionally, **31.4 percent** of charter schools (32/102) stated that their facility has limited the school's academic curriculum.

**4. Charter schools in Louisiana are planning on increasing student enrollment over the next five years, but over half of these charter schools do not have adequate space in their current facility for additional students.**

- **62.7 percent** of schools reported that they plan to increase their student enrollment over the next five years (64/102).
- Of those schools that plan to grow, **53.1 percent** do not have adequate space in their current facility for their projected growth in five years (34/64).

**5. There are underutilized or vacant district facilities throughout Louisiana.**

- In Louisiana, **38.4 percent** of charter schools have information available about vacant or underutilized (**30 percent** or more unused capacity) traditional public school facilities nearby (38/99).
- Schools in the Orleans Parish have better access to this information with **51.7 percent** of schools (31/60) having access to information about vacant or underutilized traditional public school facilities.

The Recommendations section further expands on the policy solutions that can be utilized to address the facilities challenges of Louisiana's public charter schools.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction . . . . . 2

Key Findings. . . . . 11

    #1: Charter schools in the Orleans Parish operate more frequently in district facilities than charter schools outside of the Orleans Parish. . . . . 11

    #2: Charter schools that operate in district facilities pay less for rent than schools that operate in facilities owned by other types of organizations. . . . . 13

    #3: Many Louisiana charter schools lack the technology, facility amenities, and specialized instructional spaces they require to best implement their educational program. . . . . 16

    #4: Charter schools in Louisiana are planning on increasing student enrollment over the next five years, but over half of these charter schools do not have adequate space in their current facility for additional students. . . . . 21

    #5: There are underutilized or vacant district facilities throughout Louisiana. . . . . 22

Conclusions . . . . . 24

Recommendations . . . . . 25

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## INTRODUCTION

### Charter School Facilities Initiative Background

During the 2017-18 school years, charter schools across the United States served more than 3 million students, accounting for approximately 6 percent of all K-12 public school students.<sup>1</sup> 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 sector.<sup>2</sup>

Public charter schools generally 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> Since these non-traditional spaces are not well-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.<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, charter school facilities often do not receive equal facilities funding.<sup>6</sup> Public charter schools rarely receive the same amount of facilities funding as school districts and may not be able to access tax-exempt financing.<sup>7</sup> School district facilities also may benefit from local tax or bond revenues that pay for facility construction and/or renovation, funding that charter schools typically do not have access to.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.

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- 1 Wolfe, C. (2018). Strengthening Federal Investment in Charter School Facilities. National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.
  - 2 Wolfe, C. (2018). Strengthening Federal Investment in Charter School Facilities. National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.
  - 3 Smith, N. (2012). An Accident of History: Breaking the District Monopoly on Public School Facilities. National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.
  - 4 Wolfe, C. (2018). Strengthening Federal Investment in Charter School Facilities. National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.
  - 5 Smith, N. (2012). An Accident of History: Breaking the District Monopoly on Public School Facilities. National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.
  - 6 Simnick, R. (2015). State Policy Snapshot: School District Facilities and Public Charter Schools. National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.
  - 7 Simnick, R. (2015). State Policy Snapshot: School District Facilities and Public Charter Schools. National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.
  - 8 Cunningham, J. (2011). Charter School Facilities. National Conference of State Legislatures.
  - 9 Simnick, R. (2015). State Policy Snapshot: School District Facilities and Public Charter Schools. National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.

## 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 Cuningham Group Architecture, and experts in school planning, Wayne Eckerling, Ph.D. and Allen Balczarek. The League used this survey in Colorado during the 2007-08 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 Alliance, and respective CSO partners available at <http://facilitiesinitiative.org/>.

## Charter Schools in Louisiana

Louisiana’s charter school law was enacted in 1995 to “(a) improve pupil learning and, in general, the public school system; (b) increase learning opportunities and access to quality education for pupils; (c) encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods and a variety of governance, management, and administrative structures; (d) require appropriate assessment and measurement of academic learning results; (e) account better and more thoroughly for educational results; (f) create new professional opportunities for teachers and other school employees, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site.”<sup>10</sup>

The charter school law allows two types of authorizers in Louisiana: local school boards and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). These two authorizers can operate six different types of schools under Louisiana’s charter law: Type 1, Type 2, Type 3, Type 3B, Type 4, and Type 5. A description of each type is below:<sup>11</sup>

- **Type 1:** A new charter school and authorized by a local school board.
- **Type 2:** A new charter school or a public school converted to a charter school and authorized by the BESE.
- **Type 3:** A public school that converted to a charter school and authorized by a local school board.
- **Type 3B:** Former Type 5 charter school that was transferred from the BESE back to the local school board.
- **Type 4:** A new charter school or public school converted to a charter school authorized by the local school board and BESE.
- **Type 5:** A Recovery School District (RSD) school. In 2003, the Louisiana legislature created the Recovery School District (RSD) to serve as the last intervention for schools that are considered turnaround.<sup>12</sup> Schools that have been rated F for four consecutive years by the Louisiana Department of Education are eligible for placement in the RSD.<sup>13</sup> The RSD then works with these schools to implement improvement plans and increase school performance.<sup>14</sup> If a school improves its performance, it can be transferred from the RSD back to the local school board and becomes a Type 3B school.

10 Charter School Demonstration Programs Law. (1995). 42-3972.

11 Charter School Demonstration Programs Law. (1995). 42-3973.

12 Louisiana Department of Education. (2018). Recovery School District Defined. <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/recovery-school-district/rsd-defined.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

13 Louisiana Department of Education. (2018). Recovery School District Defined. <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/recovery-school-district/rsd-defined.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

14 Louisiana Department of Education. (2018). Recovery School District Defined. <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/recovery-school-district/rsd-defined.pdf?sfvrsn=2>



During the 2017-18 school year, there were **146 charter schools** in Louisiana across all six types of charter schools. The table below lists the different types of charter schools, and provides a brief description of who authorizes them and the number of schools per type for the 2017-18 school year.<sup>15</sup>

Table 1. Types of Charter Schools in Louisiana			
Type	Type of School	Authorizer	Number of Schools
Type 1	New school	Local School Board	30
Type 2	New or conversion school	BESE	42
Type 3	Conversion school	Local School Board	13
Type 3B	Former Type 5 charter school transferred back to local school system	Local School Board	14
Type 4	New or conversion school	Local School Board & BESE	1
Type 5	Recovery School District schools	BESE	46

15 Louisiana Department of Education (2018). <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/schools/charter-oversight-and-support>

## Charter Schools in New Orleans

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, the Orleans Parish<sup>16</sup> was one of the worst performing school districts in the country. In 2005, only one-third of students in New Orleans were proficient on state assessments and **63 percent** of New Orleans students attended a failing school.<sup>17</sup> After Hurricane Katrina, the Louisiana Legislature placed most Orleans Parish schools in the RSD.<sup>18</sup> Since 2005, student achievement in the Orleans Parish has improved dramatically, and as of the 2017-18 school year, **12 percent** of New Orleans students attended a failing school.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, **93 percent** of public school students in the Orleans Parish attend a charter school.<sup>20</sup> In the 2018-19 school year, all RSD schools from the Orleans Parish will return back to the Orleans Parish School Board, and will no longer be part of the RSD.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to low school performance prior to Hurricane Katrina, the school facilities in the Orleans Parish were also in need of renovation.<sup>22</sup> In 2005, Hurricane Katrina significantly damaged or destroyed most school buildings, rendering many of them unusable.<sup>23</sup> In 2008, the School Facilities Master Plan was created with the goal of providing every student in the Orleans Parish access to a new, renovated, or refurbished facility.<sup>24</sup> The School Facilities Master Plan is one of the largest school disaster recovery programs in the United States, with 1.8 billion dollars dedicated to facility repairs and construction funded by FEMA.<sup>25</sup> The RSD is responsible for administering the School Facilities Master Plan in addition to implanting school improvement plans for schools throughout Louisiana.

16 School districts in Louisiana are referred to as parishes.

17 Louisiana Department of Education. (2018). Recovery School District Defined. <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/recovery-school-district/rsd-defined.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

18 Louisiana Department of Education. (2018). Recovery School District Defined. <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/recovery-school-district/rsd-defined.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

19 Louisiana Department of Education. (2018). Recovery School District Defined. <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/recovery-school-district/rsd-defined.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

20 Sims, P. & Rossmeier, V. (2015). *The State of Public Education in New Orleans: 10 Years After Hurricane Katrina*. The Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives at Tulane University.

21 Louisiana Department of Education. (2018). Recovery School District Defined. <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/recovery-school-district/rsd-defined.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

22 Sims, P. & Rossmeier, V. (2015). *The State of Public Education in New Orleans: 10 Years After Hurricane Katrina*. The Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives at Tulane University.

23 Sims, P. & Rossmeier, V. (2015). *The State of Public Education in New Orleans: 10 Years After Hurricane Katrina*. The Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives at Tulane University.

24 Louisiana Department of Education. (2018). Recovery School District Defined. <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/recovery-school-district/rsd-defined.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

25 Louisiana Department of Education. (2018). Recovery School District Defined. <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/recovery-school-district/rsd-defined.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

### Charter School Facilities Law in Louisiana

Louisiana law created the Louisiana Charter School Start-Up Fund, which provides zero-interest loans to both new and existing charter schools for up to \$100,000.<sup>26</sup> The loans can have terms of up to three years, and the loans can be used for facility repairs, renovations, or acquisitions.<sup>27</sup> However, Louisiana is not currently funding this program, so charters are unable to access these funds.<sup>28</sup> Louisiana law also states that through the Louisiana Public Facilities Authority charters are eligible for tax-exempt financing.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, local school boards are required to make any vacant district school facilities available to charter schools for lease or purchase.<sup>30</sup>



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

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

Each year, the National Alliance evaluates state charter schools laws and assigns an overall ranking to each state based on a corresponding evaluation rubric.<sup>31</sup> In 2018, the National Alliance ranked Louisiana #12 on its charter law out of 45 states.<sup>32</sup> NAPCS states in the report that one of the biggest areas for improvement in Louisiana’s law is providing equitable facilities funding to charter schools.<sup>33</sup> In the category “Equitable Access to Capital Funding and Facilities” Louisiana 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.”<sup>34</sup> Based on the NACPS evaluation Louisiana 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.
- Equal access to existing state facilities programs available to non-charter public schools.
- 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.
- 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.
- A mechanism to provide credit enhancement for charter school facilities.
- Charter schools allowed to contract at or below fair market value with a school district, a college or university, or any other public or for-profit or nonprofit private entity for the use of facility for a school building.
- 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.<sup>35</sup>

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31 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>

32 NAPCS. (2018). Measuring Up To The Model: A Ranking of State Public Charter School Laws. NAPCS.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 NAPCS. (2018). Louisiana. <https://www.publiccharters.org/our-work/charter-law-database/states/louisiana>

## Methodology

The information contained in this report is based on data collected from the Charter School Facilities Survey in Louisiana 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. LAPCS added 15 additional custom questions on facilities issues specific to Louisiana. 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 146 brick and mortar Louisiana charter school facilities that were eligible to participate in the survey. The survey was sent electronically to the school leaders at all eligible charter schools. Survey data was collected between March and April of 2018. As necessary, the LAPCS and the CSFI team provided technical assistance to schools completing the survey and each survey was reviewed for accuracy and completeness. School leaders at 103 eligible charter school facilities completed the Charter School Facilities survey.

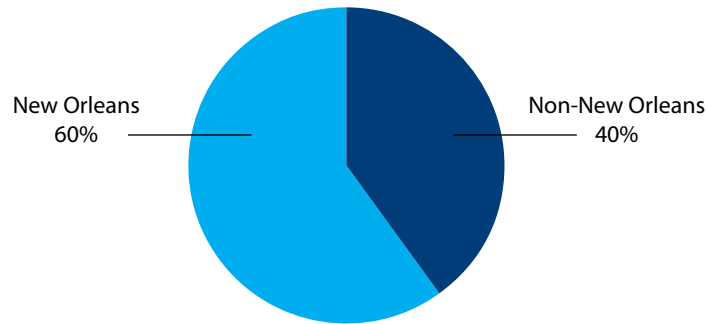
In addition to the data collected in the survey, the League also collected additional data on school enrollment, student demographics, and school funding from the Louisiana Department of Education. The policy recommendations presented in the “Recommendations” section are based on the charter school facility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



## Sample Description

103 schools participated in the Charter School Facilities Survey in Louisiana during the 2017-18 school year. Throughout this report, the results are reported disaggregated by group: Orleans and Non-Orleans. The Orleans group includes all of the schools that participated in the survey that are located in Orleans Parish<sup>36</sup> and the Non-Orleans group includes all of the schools that participated in the survey located in any parish other than Orleans Parish. In this sample, **60 percent** of schools were from Orleans Parish, and **40 percent** of schools were from Non-Orleans parishes.

Figure 1  
Survey Respondents by Parish



In Louisiana, 35.3 percent (36/102) of charter schools had a waitlist in 2017-18. For schools that had a waitlist in 2017-18, the average number of students on the waitlist was 142. In charter schools with an enrollment less than 500 the average number of students on the waitlist per school was 74 and that for charter schools with an enrollment equal to or greater than 500 the average number of students on the waitlist per school was 240 in 2017-18.

36 School districts in Louisiana are referred to as parishes.

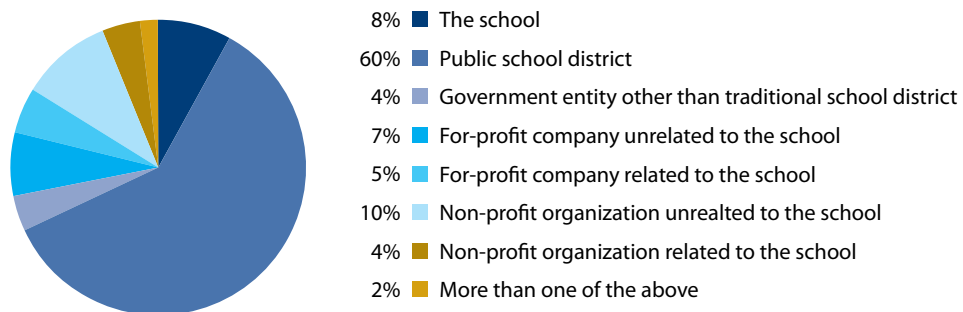
## KEY FINDINGS

### Key Finding #1: Charter schools in the Orleans Parish operate more frequently in district facilities than charter schools outside of the Orleans Parish.

Traditional public schools operate in facilities that are owned by the school district while charter schools can operate in facilities that are owned by many different types of organizations. The survey found that overall charter schools in Louisiana operate in facilities owned by several different entities:

- **8.0 percent** of schools were in a facility owned by the charter school (8/100).
- **60.0 percent** of schools were in a facility owned by the traditional public school districts (60/100).
- **4.0 percent** of schools were in a facility owned by a government entity other than a traditional public school district (4/100).
- **7.0 percent** of schools were in a facility owned by a for-profit organization related to the school (7/100).
- **5.0 percent** of schools were in a facility owned by a for-profit organization unrelated the school (5/100).
- **10.0 percent** of schools were in a facility owned by a non-profit organization unrelated to the school (10/100).
- **4.0 percent** of schools were in a facility owned by a non-profit organization related to the school (4/100).
- **2.0 percent** of schools were in a facility owned by more than one of the organizations listed above (2/100).

Figure 2  
Statewide Facility Ownership Averages



While the overall averages make it seem as if the majority of charter schools operate in facilities that are owned by the traditional public school district, schools in the Orleans Parish actually operate in district facilities at a much higher percentage than schools in the Non-Orleans parishes. Table 2 displays the facility ownership by parish.

Table 2. Facility Ownership by Parish		
Ownership	Orleans	Non-Orleans
The school	0.0%	20.0%
Public school district	81.7%	27.5%
Government entity other than a traditional school district	3.3%	5.0%
For-profit company unrelated to the school	3.3%	12.5%
For-profit company related to the school	1.7%	10.0%
Non-profit organization unrelated to the school	5.0%	17.5%
Non-profit organization related to the school	1.7%	7.5%
More than one of the above	3.3%	0.0%

Table 2 indicates that in the Orleans Parish, **81.7 percent** of schools operated in a facility owned by the school district, while in Non-Orleans parishes, only **27.5 percent** of schools operated in a facility owned by the school district. However, in the Non-Orleans parishes, **20.0 percent** of schools operate in a facility they own, while none of the schools in the Orleans Parish own their school facility. Across Louisiana, schools in the Orleans Parish have better access to district facilities than in the Non-Orleans parishes, but schools in Non-Orleans parishes are better able to build their own facilities.



**Key Finding #2: Charter schools that operate in district facilities pay less for rent than schools that operate in facilities owned by other types of organizations.**

73.0 percent of schools pay for their facility and/or land associated with the facility (73/100). The average amount paid by the schools was \$95,189. The average annual rent paid by a school in the Orleans Parish was \$70,101 and in the Non-Orleans parishes was \$149,727. Using per-pupil revenue data from the Louisiana Department of Education, we were able to calculate the average rent payment as a percent of per-pupil revenue (PPR). In 2017-18, the average charter school in Louisiana spent \$276 per pupil on rent or **1.9 percent** of per pupil funding.

The per-pupil rent varied based on the ownership of the school facility:

- Charter schools that rented their facility from a public school district paid **\$70 per pupil** or **0.5 percent** of per pupil funding (50/60).
- Charter schools that rented their facility from a government entity other than the public school district paid **\$897 per pupil** or **4.7 percent** of per pupil funding (2/4).
- Charter schools that rented their facility from a for-profit organization unrelated to the school paid **\$941 per pupil** or **6.9 percent** of per pupil funding (7/7).
- Charter schools that rented their facilities from a for-profit organization related to the school paid **\$513 per pupil** or **3.8 percent** of per pupil funding (2/5).
- Charter schools that rented their facilities from a non-profit organization unrelated to the school paid **\$651 per pupil** or **4.4 percent** of per pupil funding (9/10).
- Charter schools that rented their facilities from a non-profit organization related to the school paid **\$627 per pupil** or **3.4 percent** of per pupil funding (2/4).
- A charter school that rented their facility from more than one of the above organizations paid **\$131 per pupil** or **1.2 percent** of per pupil funding (1/2).<sup>37</sup>

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37 The survey did not ask questions about loan or other financing payments for charter schools that own their buildings.

A breakdown of the rent expense by parish can be seen in the table below.

Table 3. Facility Cost by Type of Ownership and Parish				
Ownership	Orleans		Non-Orleans	
	Rent Per Pupil	% of PPR	Rent Per Pupil	% of PPR
Public school district	\$42	0.3%	\$197	1.6%
Government entity other than a traditional school district	\$1,515	6.9%	\$279	2.5%
For-profit company unrelated to the school	\$734	4.0%	\$1,023	8.1%
For-profit company related to the school	\$530	4.2%	\$496	3.4%
Non-profit organization unrelated to the school	\$1,136	6.4%	\$409	3.4%
Non-profit organization related to the school	\$982	4.5%	\$273	2.3%
More than one of the above	\$131	1.2%	-	-
Average Cost	\$195	1.1%	\$452	3.6%

In both the Orleans and Non-Orleans parishes, facilities owned by the public school district have the lowest per-pupil expense, and are the most affordable option for schools. In the Orleans Parish, the most expensive option for facilities rental is renting from a government entity, and in the Non-Orleans parishes the most expensive option is renting from a for-profit company unrelated to the school. In both of these cases, the overall percent of per-pupil revenue spent on facilities is between **6.9-8.1 percent**, which is significantly higher than the average per-pupil revenue of **1.1 percent** for the Orleans Parish and **3.6 percent** for the Non-Orleans parishes. In addition to rental payment on their facilities, **96.0 percent** of schools pay for their utility bills (95/99). The average utility expense per school was \$104,028.

Charter schools often undertake capital projects to renovate their facility. In Louisiana, **57.0 percent** of schools have undergone major capital projects that cost \$20,000 or more in the past five years (57/100). The average total cost of these major capital projects per school was \$3 million and **69.0 percent** of schools that operated in a facility built prior to 2010 have undergone major capital projects in the last five years.

Charter schools can also obtain financing for their facility. In Louisiana, **11.3 percent** of schools have a non-taxpayer bond or loan expenditure on the facility and/or the land associated with the facility (11/97). Of these schools, **6.8 percent** are located in the Orleans Parish and **18.4 percent** are located in Non-Orleans parishes. The average annual principal and interest payment for these bonds or loan expenditure was \$2.85 million. The total value of these bonds/loans at origination varies from \$75,000 to \$23 million with an average of \$10.6 million. The interest rates on these vary from **2.9 to 5.5 percent** with an average of **4.4 percent**. The average term of these bonds/loans is 18 years.

The survey also asked charter schools questions specific to Louisiana about their past financing practices and options. The findings from those questions are as follows:

- **7.7 percent** of schools have been approved by the Louisiana Bond Commission, **9.9 percent** have not been approved, while the remaining 82.4 percent have never applied.
- **8.0 percent** of schools used historic tax credits (7/87). All of the schools that used historic tax credits are in the Orleans Parish.
- **6.5 percent** of schools have been presented with different facility financing quotes based upon charter school term lengths (6/93).
- **21.9 percent** of schools have a local or community banking partner (21/96).
- **6.7 percent** of schools have been denied by bank/lenders in the past for facility investment (6/90).
- **91.8 percent** schools have access or receive E-Rate (89/97). Of the schools that did not have access or receive E-rate, 87.5 percent were schools in Non-Orleans parishes. The schools that did not have access or receive E-rate cited reasons such as the lack of understanding about E-Rate rules, lack of time, and the need of additional support to access E-Rate.
- **15.8 percent** schools reported that they were unable to acquire the type of facility needed based on their charter application (15/95).
- **1.5 percent** of schools have operating agreements with specific facility related stipulations (56/91).
- **77.2 percent** of schools have not been explicitly included in a local district's facility millage campaign (71/92). Of these schools, **67.9 percent** in the Orleans Parish were not included and **91.7 percent** in Non-Orleans parishes were not included.

**Key Finding #3: Many Louisiana charter schools lack the technology, facility amenities, and specialized instructional spaces they require to best implement their educational program.**

Charter schools can struggle to obtain access to district facilities, which are specifically designed for educational purposes, and they often operate in non-traditional facilities.<sup>38</sup> However, since these non-traditional facilities were not originally designed for educational purposes, they may lack the instructional spaces necessary to implement certain academic curriculums, and they may also lack amenities that are often considered standard in district facilities, such as a lunchrooms or gymnasiums.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, charter schools that are in non-traditional facilities may also struggle with sufficient technology infrastructures.

The survey found that **17.6 percent** of schools did not have sufficient internet, WAN, LAN, and Wi-Fi infrastructure for their current and future testing, learning and administrative bandwidth needs (18/102). **14.8 percent** of the total number of schools in the Orleans Parish did not have sufficient technology infrastructure, and **22.0 percent** of the total number of schools in Non-Orleans parishes did not have sufficient technology infrastructure. Of these schools, **77.8 percent** were built prior to 1960 (14/18). For schools that needed upgrades to their technology infrastructure, additional bandwidth and additional coverage/capacity in the building were the two most common areas reported.

Additionally, **11.8 percent** of schools were unable to install sufficient broadband to access high quality digital content (12/102). Of the **11.8 percent** of schools that have facility challenges that prevented the installation of sufficient broadband to access high quality digital content, **30.8 percent** are located in Non-Orleans parishes (4/12).

The survey also found that Louisiana students had differing access to computers:

- **70.7 percent** of schools reported having a dedicated computer lab at their facility (70/99).
- **22.5 percent** of schools issued individual laptops or tablets to every student (23/102).
- **88.6 percent** reported having one or more mobile computer labs in addition to, or instead of, a dedicated computer lab(s) (70/79).

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

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

In Louisiana, **38.2 percent** of schools (39/102) reported that they did not have the necessary amenities to best implement their educational program. **31.1 percent** of schools in the Orleans Parish did not have the necessary amenities to best implement their education program (19/61) and **48.8 percent** of schools in the Non-Orleans parishes did not have the necessary amenities to best implement their education program (20/41). Additionally, **31.4 percent** of charter schools (32/102) stated that their facility has limited the school’s academic curriculum.

Schools in Louisiana statewide reported not having the following amenities:

- **6.9 percent** of schools did not have a lunchroom (7/102).
- **27.7 percent** of schools did not have a dedicated library/media center at their facility (28/101).
- **36.7 percent** of schools did not have a dedicated science lab at their facility (36/98).
- **28.7 percent** of schools did not have an art room (29/101).
- **35.6 percent** of schools did not have a music room (36/101).
- **37.8 percent** of schools did not have a multi-purpose room or space (37/98).
- **55.4 percent** of charter schools did not have a health clinic (56/101).

Table 4 shows the percentage of schools that did not have certain amenities by parish:

Table 4. Facility Amenities by Parish			
Amenity	Statewide	Orleans	Non-Orleans
Did not have a lunchroom	6.9%	3.4%	13.9%
Did not have a library/media centers	27.7%	15.0%	46.3%
Did not have a science lab	36.7%	28.1%	48.8%
Did not have an art room	28.7%	13.3%	51.2%
Did not have a music room	35.6%	25.0%	51.2%
Did not have a multipurpose room	37.8%	47.4%	24.4%
Did not have a health clinic	55.4%	55.0%	56.1%

On average, schools in the Orleans Parish had more amenities than schools in the Non-Orleans parishes. However, there are more schools in the Orleans Parish that operate in district-owned facilities, which typically come with standard amenities such as lunchrooms.

Serving meals is also a challenge for some charter schools, and in Louisiana, over **24 percent** of schools do not have the space or equipment to keep food warm or cold. Schools in Louisiana reported the following regarding their lunch service:

- **23.5 percent** of charter school facilities did not have a full preparatory food kitchen that meets the requirements to prepare hot meals under the federally subsidized meal program (24/102). **46.3 percent** of schools in parishes outside of New Orleans did not have a full preparatory food kitchen (19/41) compared to only 8.2 percent of schools in Orleans Parish (5/51).
- **25.5 percent** of schools did not have the dedicated space and equipment for keeping food warm that was typically prepared off-site for students (26/102). The average percentage is similar between Orleans and Non-Orleans parishes.
- **25.5 percent** of schools did not have the dedicated space and equipment for keeping food cold for students (26/102). The average percentage is similar between Orleans and Non-Orleans parishes.
- **23.5 percent** of schools did not have the space or equipment to keep food warm or cold (24/102). Of these 24 schools that did not have the space or equipment to keep food warm or cold, **87.5 percent** of them did not have lunches brought in by an outside vendor or caterer (21/24). The average percentage is similar between Orleans and Non-Orleans parishes.

Table 5 displays the lunch service challenges by parish:

Table 5. Lunch Service Challenges			
Amenity	Overall	Orleans	Non-Orleans
Did not have a full preparatory food kitchen that meets the requirements to prepare hot meals under the federally subsidized meal program	23.5%	8.2%	46.3%
Did not have the dedicated space and equipment for keeping food that was typically prepared off-site for students warm	25.5%	27.9%	22.0%
Did not have the dedicated space and equipment for keeping food for students cold	25.5%	27.9%	22.0%
Did not have the space or equipment to keep food warm or cold	23.5%	26.2%	19.5%

Louisiana charter schools also have limited access to outdoor athletic spaces. **34.3 percent** schools had their own outdoor athletic field (35/102), while another **9.8 percent** (10/102) had access to a local/adjacent athletic field offsite. The average annual payment was \$9,075, with schools in the Orleans Parish paying an average payment of \$6,438 and schools in the Non-Orleans parishes paying an average payment of \$12,592.

While Louisiana's charter schools lack some amenities, many schools had access to playgrounds and gymnasiums. **77.5 percent** of schools serving grades K-5 had their own playground (55/71) and **5.6 percent** used a local or adjacent playground (4/71). The remaining **16.9 percent** had no playground access (12/71). In addition, **49.0 percent** charter schools had their own dedicated gymnasium (50/102), **9.8 percent** had a combination gymnasium like a "gymnatorium" (10/102), **2.0 percent** of schools had access to a local gymnasium for school use, while the remaining **39.2 percent** of charter schools did not have, nor did they have access to, a gymnasium of any type (40/102). **5.1 percent** schools paid to use a nearby gym (5/99). The average amount paid for using a nearby gym is \$9,000, with schools in the Orleans Parish paying \$15,000 and schools in the Non-Orleans parishes paying \$3,000.



There were also concerns about the physical and learning environment. The survey found:

- **37.6 percent** of schools have experienced indoor air quality problems (38/101).
- **32.7 percent** of schools reported that noise generated in other classrooms or corridors is disruptive to learning (33/101).
- **34.7 percent** of schools reported that classroom temperatures that are not reasonably comfortable throughout the school year (35/101).
- **49.5 percent** of schools stated that a majority of the school’s windows are not insulated (thermal pane) glass (49/99).

Table 6 displays the learning environment concerns by parish:

Table 6. Learning Environment Concerns by Parish			
Amenity	Overall	Orleans	Non-Orleans
Experienced indoor air quality problems	37.6%	39.3%	35.0%
Noise generated in other classrooms or corridors is disruptive to learning	32.7%	26.2%	42.5%
Classroom temperatures are not reasonably comfortable	34.7%	39.3%	27.5%
School windows are not insulated glass	49.5%	45.0%	56.4%

The survey also found that **48.5 percent** of schools (48/99) would welcome additional investment in security for their facilities. The survey found:

- **30.3 percent** of schools need resources to improve their controlled access system at the main entrance (30/99).
- **34.0 percent** of schools need resources to improve their two-way locks on all classroom doors (33/97).
- **21.2 percent** of schools need resources to improve their public address system (21/99).
- **23.3 percent** of schools need resources to improve their video surveillance system (23/99).



**Key Finding #4: Charter schools in Louisiana are planning on increasing student enrollment over the next five years, but over half of these charter schools do not have adequate space in their current facility for additional students.**

**62.7 percent** of schools reported that they plan to increase their student enrollment over the next five years (64/102). **57.4 percent** of schools in the Orleans Parish are planning to increase their student enrollment, and **70.7 percent** of schools in the Non-Orleans parishes are planning to increase their student enrollment. Additionally, **68.1 percent** of schools that have been operating for less than 10 years plan to increase their enrollment over the next 5 years (49/72) while **46.4 percent** of schools that have been operating for more than 10 years plan to grow in the next 5 years (13/28). Of the schools that are planning to grow, **43.8 percent** are in the process of adding new grade levels (28/64).

For schools that plan to grow, the average projected enrollment growth between 2017-18 and 2023-24 was 719 students, with the averages being similar between Orleans and Non-Orleans parishes. This represents an **42.6 percent** increase in student enrollment over the next 5 years.

Of those schools that plan to grow, **53.1 percent** do not have adequate space in their current facility for their projected growth in five years (34/64). Furthermore, **41.2 percent** of these schools do not have a feasible, specific plan to construct or acquire adequate space (14/34). The percentage of schools that do not have a feasible plan is similar for schools in the Orleans and Non-Orleans parishes. Of the schools that plan to grow but do not have the adequate space and do not have a plan, 50.0 percent of them are in the Orleans Parish (7/14) and **50.0 percent** of them are in Non-Orleans parishes (7/14).

**Key Finding #5: There are underutilized or vacant district facilities throughout Louisiana.**

School districts can have facilities that are underutilized or vacant, but charter school access to these facilities varies greatly from state to state. In Louisiana, **38.4 percent** of charter schools have access to information about nearby vacant or underutilized (30 percent or more unused capacity) district school facilities (38/99). Schools in the Orleans Parish have better access to information about nearby vacant or underutilized district school facilities, with **51.7 percent** of schools (31/60) having access to this information. In Non-Orleans parishes, only **17.9 percent** of charter schools have access to information about vacant or underutilized district school facilities (7/39). Additionally, **19 percent** of charter schools believe to the best of their knowledge that there is a vacant district owned facility near their school (19/100), and **21.0 percent** believe there is an underutilized district owned facility near their school (21/100).



Charter schools can often ask the school district for permission to use a vacant or underutilized facility. In Louisiana, **39.5 percent** of charter schools have asked for use of an underutilized district facility (30/76). **56.7 percent** of these charter schools were offered use of the school district's underutilized or vacant facility after asking (17/30). However, there are differences between the Orleans Parish and Non-Orleans parishes. In the Orleans Parish, **70.0 percent** of the charter schools that asked for use of an underutilized district facility received it (14/20), while in Non-Orleans parishes, only **37.5 percent** of charter schools that asked for use of the underutilized facility received it (3/8).

Due to the lack of available facilities or facilities financing, some charter schools choose to co-locate within a facility that is shared with other schools or organizations. In Louisiana, **17.6 percent** of charter schools co-locate with another school and/or organization (18/102). Of those that co-locate, **61.1 percent** of charter schools share their facility with another school (11/18). In the Orleans Parish, **14.8 percent** schools co-locate (9/61) while **22.0 percent** of schools in Non-Orleans parishes co-locate (9/41).

Among schools that have co-located, **94.4 percent** have been in operation for less than 8 years (17/18) and **27.8 percent** of schools stated that co-location interferes with the school's ability to implement its curriculum and educational model (5/18). The most common problems cited by these co-located schools include limited access to common spaces and operational challenges. While co-location can have its challenges, of the schools near an underutilized district facility, **52.4 percent** of these schools (11/21) would be willing to co-locate if given the option. **42.9 percent** of schools in the Orleans Parish would be willing to co-locate if given the option, compared to **71.4 percent** of schools in the Non-Orleans parishes.

## CONCLUSIONS

The facilities landscape in Louisiana looks vastly different than other states due to the unique context of New Orleans. In both Orleans and Non-Orleans parishes, charter schools that operated in a district-owned facility paid the least amount per-pupil for their facility. However, schools in the Orleans Parish had greater access to these district-owned facilities than schools in Non-Orleans parishes, due to the recovery efforts and policy reforms that were undertaken in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. This greater access to district-owned facilities resulted in lower facilities costs for charters in the Orleans Parish, and more schools being equipped with the amenities necessary to best implement instructional programs. Nationwide, many charter schools struggle to obtain affordable and adequate facilities, but the majority of charter schools in the Orleans Parish do not encounter the same facilities challenges. The Orleans Parish is an example of how the facilities landscape within a state can change if charters have access to affordable and adequate facilities. Orleans Parish charters are spending less of their operating revenue on facilities costs, and can allocate that revenue elsewhere to better serve their students.

While charter schools in the Orleans Parish have access to district-owned facilities, this is not true for charter schools in the Non-Orleans parishes. Schools in the Non-Orleans parishes pay twice as much on facility rent as schools in the Orleans Parish. Additionally, the overall percent of per-pupil revenue that schools spent on facilities is more in the Non-Orleans parishes than the Orleans Parish. Schools in the Non-Orleans parishes also have fewer amenities than schools in the Orleans Parish. Schools in the Non-Orleans parishes are paying more for inadequate facilities that do not meet their needs.

Due to its unique historical events, the Orleans Parish has essentially solved common facilities challenges that affect charter schools. The Orleans Parish is thus an example of what other parishes in Louisiana and nationwide should strive for in terms of facilities access, affordability, and adequacy.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

From a legislative priority perspective, there are several possible solutions Louisiana may consider adopting to help mitigate the facilities challenges that exist in many parishes:

- 1. Fund the Charter School Start-Up Fund or create a state grant or loan program for charter school facilities. Funding existing legislation, or creating a state loan or grant program could help charter schools build facilities in areas where there are facility shortages, and allow the charter school to customize the facility to meet their instructional needs.**
- 2. Pass 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. While schools in the Orleans Parish have access to district facilities, schools located in Non-Orleans parishes do not have the same access. Providing charters in all parishes in Louisiana with school district facilities, or funding for schools that serve a majority of students that live in the district, would help alleviate the facilities costs that charter schools incur.**
- 3. Create a per-pupil facilities allowance that annually reflects average district capital costs. While schools in the Orleans Parish have affordable facilities, schools located in Non-Orleans parishes do not have the same affordable facilities options. This facilities allowance would help offset facilities costs that charter schools in Non-Orleans parishes incur as they navigate the availability of affordable facilities.**
- 4. Pledging the moral obligation of the state to help charter schools obtain more favorable bond financing terms. As charter schools in Louisiana expand and new charter schools open, having access to favorable bond financing terms will allow Louisiana charters to build their own facilities or renovate non-traditional spaces if district facilities are not available.**

The recommendations listed above may help alleviate the facilities issues of access and affordability for charters in Non-Orleans parishes, and allow Louisiana 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 Louisiana* 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 Louisiana Association for Public Charter Schools.

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