CHARTER SCHOOL
FACILITIES INITIATIVE

CHARTER SCHOOL FACILITIES INITIATIVE
INITIAL FINDINGS FROM TEN STATES

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COLORADO LEAGUE of CHARTER SCHOOLS
focus on achievement

National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

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AIR
American Institutes for Research

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PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Charter schools across the nation struggle with inadequate and costly facilities. Recognizing the need for accurate facilities related data, the Colorado League of Charter Schools ("the League") developed the Charter School Facilities Survey. The Survey was first administered to charter schools across the state of Colorado. The League published the results of the Colorado Charter School Facilities Survey in a 2008 report entitled *"Shortchanged Charters: How Funding Disparities Hurt Colorado's Charter Schools."* With the help of the Shortchanged Charters Report, the League was able to move forward state legislation and local policy changes that have positively impacted Colorado's charter schools.

Eager to help other states obtain similar legislative success for their charter schools, the League launched the Charter School Facilities Initiative ("CSFI") in conjunction with the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (the "Alliance"). Through a contract with the U.S. Department of Education, the National Charter School Resource Center provided funding for the CSFI in four states;[1] Idaho, Massachusetts, Michigan, and New Jersey. The goal of the CSFI is to identify prominent shortcomings in the current capital landscape and to develop public policy recommendations leading to a comprehensive, long-range system for providing adequate and equitable facilities for public charter schools.

To that end, the CSFI uses the Charter School Facilities Survey to gather objective, reliable, and comprehensive facilities data from each partner state's charter community. With assistance from the participating states' Charter Support Organization ("CSO"), the League customized each state survey to fit the local context. The League's research team assisted with data collection and data analysis and provided each CSO with a state specific report. Reports for Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, Tennessee and Texas are currently available on the CSFI website: www.facilitiesinitiative.org. The New York report will be available on the website after the state CSO has released the report to its community and local media. To date, ten states have participated in the CSFI. Table 1 outlines the states that have participated and the timeframe in which the data collection occurred.

1 The CSFI is partially funded by the National Charter School Resource Center at American Institutes for Research ("Resource Center") as part of its mission to provide the resources, information, and technical assistance to support high-quality charter schools. The Resource Center is funded through the U.S. Department of Education.

Table 1. Timeline of Data Collection for the Charter School Facilities Initiative through Summer 2012

Semester, Year of Participation	States that have Participated in the Charter School Facilities Initiative as of September 2012
Fall, 2007	Colorado
Fall, 2010	Georgia, Indiana, Texas
Fall, 2011	New York, Tennessee
Spring, 2012	Idaho, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey
Total Number of States	10

In addition, the CSFI has developed a database which houses all of the common survey items. The ultimate goal is to build a comprehensive data set that represents at least half of the nation's charter school facilities. The resulting facilities data set will help to identify common trends across charter school facilities, including: access to public facilities, facilities financing, and size and other amenities. Further, this data set will also be used to research links between facilities attributes and school outcomes measures like teacher retention and school performance.

Currently, the CSFI database includes survey data from 956 charter schools across ten states. While the data set has not yet reached the point of national charter sector representation, data from ten states can provide a glimpse into emerging patterns. This report provides initial findings across the ten states with respect to charter school facilities' size, resource availability, and expenditures.

METHODOLOGY

In order to make nationally relevant statements about the state of charter school facilities across the country, the data set needs to represent the national charter landscape. To accomplish this, the League developed a sampling method based on the "size of the state" (number of charters in the state), the age of charter sector, and geographic conditions. One-hundred percent of the charter school facilities in each selected state were invited to participate in the survey.

Overall participations rates, by state, varied from 36 percent in Texas (with 537 charter school facilities) to 96 percent in Idaho (with 53 charter school facilities). For the purposes of the CSFI surveys, facilities (not charter schools) are the unit of analysis, and the number of charter schools in a state does not necessarily equal the number of charter school facilities. In this survey, schools that have separate state identification numbers, but share the same site and have the same chartering board, are considered to be one case (or facility). Additionally, for charter schools with multiple campuses, each campus is considered a separate facility and, therefore, a separate case. Further, when two or more charter schools share a building (co-location) each individual school is considered a separate case. In these instances, facility identification numbers are used to ensure that the spaces are accounted for appropriately. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the number of charter schools and facilities in each state, as well as the percentage of facilities that have participated in the study thus far.

Table 2. Number of Charter Schools, Charter School Facilities, and Percent Participation by State

State	Number of Charter Schools (when surveyed)	Number of Charter School Facilities (when surveyed)	Percent of Charter Facilities to Participate
Colorado[2]	141	141	75%
Georgia	43	43	84%
Idaho	43	53	96%
Indiana	59	59	59%
Massachusetts	70	69	91%
Michigan	201	298	67%
New Jersey	89	92	75%
New York	186	200	86%
Tennessee	41	36	86%
Texas	208	537	36%

Survey Development

The CSFI required the best possible survey to capture valid and reliable data about charter school facilities and their needs. To accomplish this, Dr. Jody Ernst, the League's Director of Research and Evaluation, and Jim Griffin, the League's President, commissioned a survey design team featuring Hutton Architecture Studio, former school district administrators Dr. Wayne Eckerling and Allen Balczarek, and various school leaders. Hutton Architecture Studio's lead architect, Paul Hutton, has designed a variety of schools and is known for his creative, cost effective, and environmentally-conscious facilities. He currently serves as a member on the Committee on Architecture for Education (CAE) Advisory Group for the American Institute of Architect's School Division. Dr. Wayne Eckerling and Allen Balczarek together have more than 60 years of experience in public school teaching and administration. Dr. Eckerling is a former assistant superintendent in the Denver Public Schools where he was responsible for supervision of charter schools, planning, and research. Mr. Balczarek was a planning and research director for Denver Public Schools and his responsibilities included new school planning and program implementation. Both Dr. Eckerling and Mr. Balczarek also have experience with general obligation bond planning and implementation.

2 Following the release of the Colorado report in April 2008, a number of additional charter schools submitted facilities surveys. The figures in this report are inclusive of all the Colorado charters that submitted facilities surveys.

The Charter School Facilities Survey addressed three main topics, including:

1. General Facility Information

- Demographic information including grades served, year of inception, and the number of students on any waiting lists.
- Future facility plans.
- Year of construction.
- Facility ownership.
- Facility adequacy, condition, and maintainability.

2. Facility Funding and Expenditures

- Annual rental, loan, and/or bond payments.
- Capital project expenditures.
- Access to public funding in support of capital costs (e.g. school district assets, bond funds, state facility funds).

3. Measurements of the Facility, Site, and Instructional Spaces

- Facility, site, and classroom size.
- Information technology resources.
- Facility amenities such as gymnasiums, lunch rooms, libraries, and playgrounds.

For each participating state the survey was streamlined to exclude extraneous items to cut down on the time that it took schools to complete the survey. This survey was also tailored to fit the specific landscape and needs of each state. In addition, the League worked closely with each state's Charter Support Organization (CSO) to ensure that the survey was customized to fit the local context and vernacular. For example, in Texas, charter schools are not allowed access to local tax revenue. Therefore, the district bond election section that was included in other state surveys was dropped from the Texas survey in its entirety. Local terms were also woven into the survey; replacing "charter school" with "community school," in Texas for example, to enhance face validity for the respondents.

Data Collection

The Facilities Survey was administered via an online survey tool. School administrators were responsible for completing survey questions regarding the facility in general, including: grade levels served, original construction year, and perceptions regarding the condition of the facility and its impact on student learning. Charter school business managers (who are sometimes also the principal) were asked to report on capital projects completed, funding sources, the amount spent on rents or mortgages, and whether the school has participated in any local facilities funding programs. Both the general facility and facility funding and expenditures sections took an average of 20 minutes to complete. The size of the facility, site, and instructional spaces was assessed by paid consultants using laser and/or wheeled measurement devices.

State CSOs led on-the-ground data collection efforts. CSO staff members hired and oversaw the measurement consultants and worked with the League to manage the overall project. The League trained the CSO staff and consultants, to support the implementation of the survey process, and to oversee the data compilation. The League's research team cleaned, formatted, and analyzed all the survey and measurement data. The survey data was then merged with enrollment, per-pupil funding, and school demographic data obtained from each states' department of education.

Facilities Standards

Standards for each state were derived from more than a decade of published regional and national new school construction data[3] from traditional school districts, local state or district standards (as available), and professional judgment and input from leading educational architects. The standards are intended to be neither excessively generous in allocating space nor unnecessarily limiting to charter school opportunities. (Appendices A-D show the relevant classroom, facility and site size standards for each of the ten states that have participated in the Charter School Facilities Survey).

3 School Planning and Management's Annual School Construction Reports for each year, including 2001 through 2012.

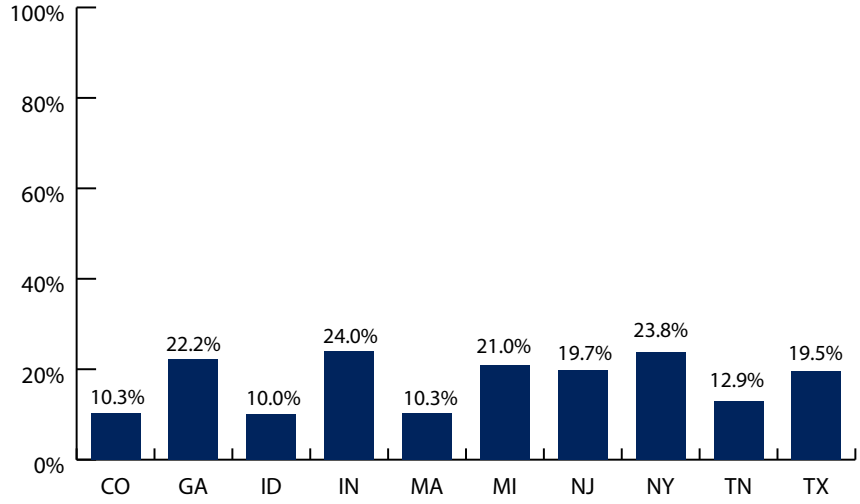
CHARTER SCHOOL FACILITY SIZE

When compared to traditional public school standards and practices for new school construction, charter schools across the ten states surveyed exhibited similar trends in at least five areas: generally smaller facility sizes, generally smaller classroom sizes, lack of a federally-approved kitchen facility, limited access to gymnasiums, and a lack of one or more specialized instructional spaces (e.g., libraries, computer labs, or art and music rooms). The following are the key findings from the multi-state analysis:

Key Finding #1: Few charter schools meet the standards for overall facility size[4]

Using measurements of the overall square footage per student, between ten and 24 percent of charter schools in each state meet grade level standards (see Figure 1). As is described in subsequent key findings, the smaller overall size of charter school facilities is often due to a lack of one or more specialized instructional spaces.

Figure 1. Percent of Charter School Facilities Meeting Size Standards



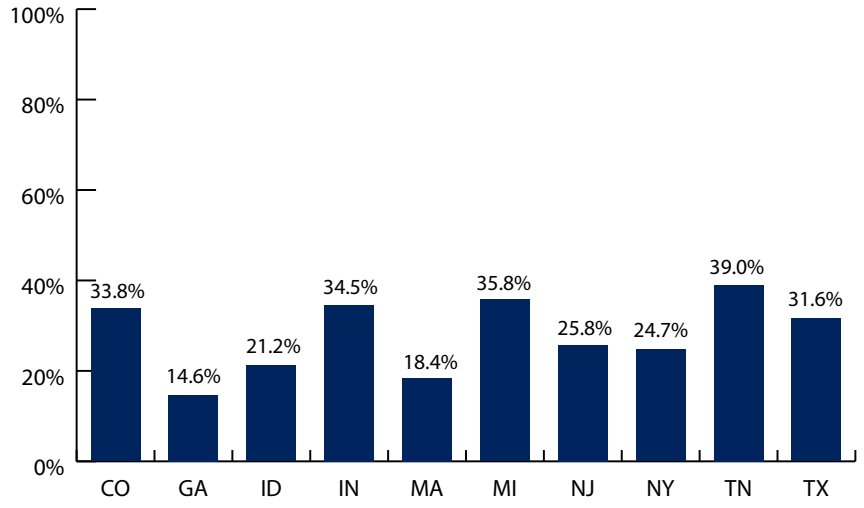
Charter schools' overall facilities may also be smaller than standards as a result of having smaller classrooms. Key Finding #2 supports this conclusion.

4 The Facilities Size Standards for CO, GA, IN, and TX have been updated from previous reports based on a more robust national model.

Key Finding #2: Few charter school classrooms meet grade level standards, based on square footage per student

When grade level and instructional design[5] are taken into account, results from the survey indicate that between 14.6 and 39.0 percent of charter school classrooms in each state are meeting or exceeding standards (see Figure 2). Said another way, at least 60 percent of charter school classrooms in each state are considerably smaller than classrooms built by districts for traditional public schools over the last ten years.

Figure 2. Percent of Charter School Classrooms Meeting or Exceeding Size Standards in each State[6]



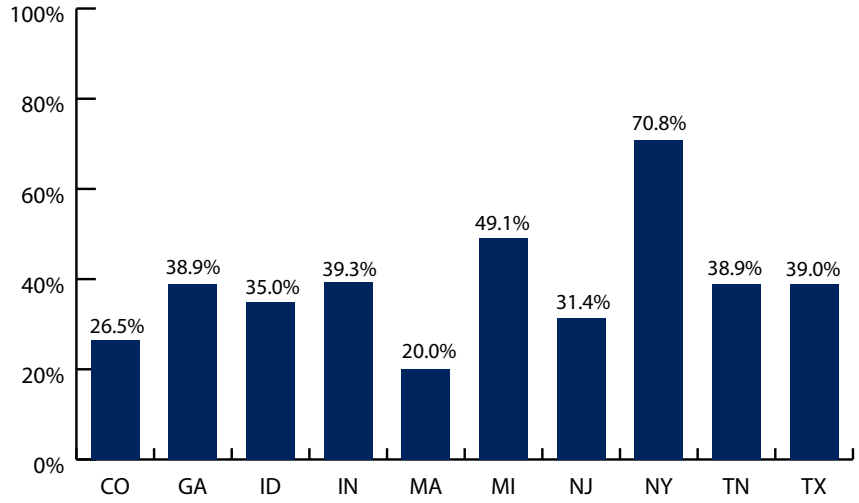
5 School administrators reported whether the school's instructional design required specific space requirements, such as Montessori or STEM. Schools that identified specific designs were held to publish standards for those designs.

6 The Classroom Size Standards for CO, GA, IN, and TX have been updated from previous reports based on a more robust national model.

Key Finding #3: A majority of charter schools lack federally-approved kitchen facilities

In a majority of states (9 out of 10), fewer than 50 percent of charter schools have a kitchen facility that qualifies the school to prepare meals onsite and also meets federal standards for the Free and Reduced Price Meal Program. New York, with over 70 percent of schools having qualified kitchens, is the only state with significantly more than half of all charters to have full service kitchen facilities (see Figure 3). Instead, most charter schools possess warmers and refrigeration units to keep food (prepared by outside vendors) hot or cold. On average, 74.5 percent of charter schools in each state have a warmer (ranging from 45.2 percent in Idaho to 100 percent in Tennessee) and 81.4 percent have a refrigeration unit (ranging from 47.6 percent in Idaho to 100 percent in Tennessee).

Figure 3. Percent of Charter Schools With a Full-Preparatory, Federally-Compliant Kitchen Facility



It should be noted that schools are not required to prepare food onsite to receive federal reimbursement for free and reduced priced meals. Schools purchasing meals from vendors that have federally-approved kitchens may also obtain reimbursement. However, vendors' meals may cost more than the federal reimbursement rate[7] and may leave charter schools to make up the difference.

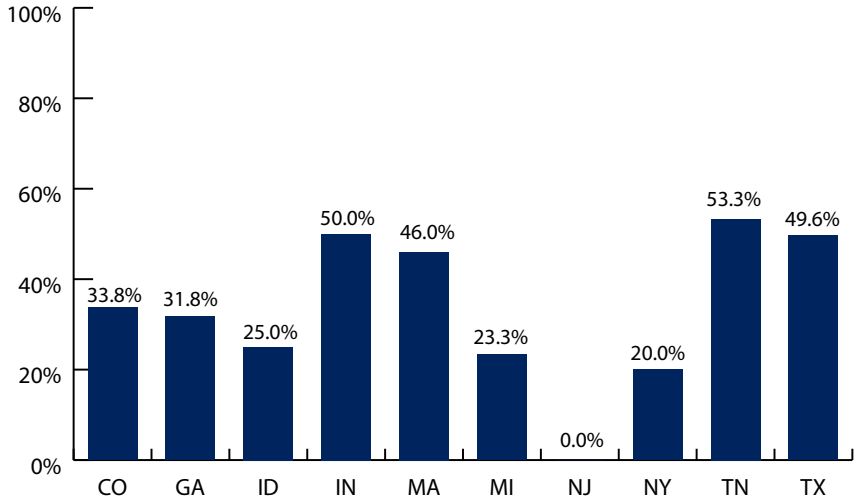
7 The reimbursement rate was approximately $2.70 for free lunch in 2011-12, depending on school demographics.

Key Finding #4: Many charter high schools lack access to a gymnasium

New Jersey was the only state surveyed in which 100 percent of charter middle schools and high schools had either a gymnasium onsite or had access to a nearby gymnasium. The other nine states' charter high schools did not fare as well.

In New York, 20 percent of high schools lacked access to a gymnasium, while in Indiana, Tennessee, and Texas roughly 50 percent of charter high schools did not have access to a gymnasium. Figure 4 shows the percentage of secondary charter schools that lacked access to a gymnasium in each of the ten states.

Figure 4. Percent of Secondary Charter Schools without Access to a Gymnasium



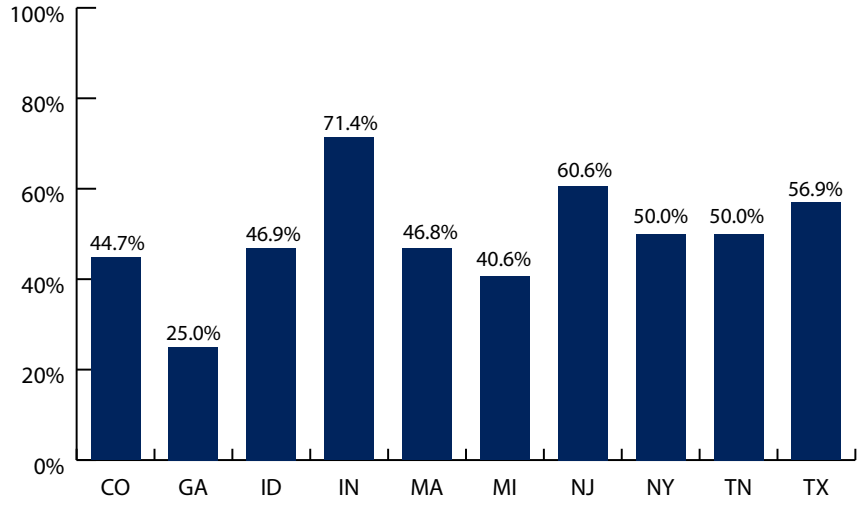
Secondary schools without access to gymnasiums are limited in the physical fitness activities they can offer and the times throughout the school day they can offer them. In some states, such as Massachusetts, charter schools without an onsite gymnasium will rent one at another location, sometimes requiring the school to provide transportation to get students there. These charter schools pay nearly $20,000, on average, per year[8] to rent and transport students to the facility in order to provide physical education and competitive sport programs.

8 The average annual rental payment for the use of gyms and/or athletic fields was $11,935 and the average annual cost to transport students to the rented facilities was $7,391, for an average total payment of $19,326.

Key Finding #5: Many charter schools lack at least one specialized instructional space

As mentioned in Key Finding #1, when charter school facilities are small it is often due to the lack of one or more specialized instructional spaces, such as libraries, science or computer labs, and art or music classrooms. The following figures depict the percent of charter schools in each state that lack dedicated spaces for libraries (Figure 5), computer labs (Figures 6 and 7), secondary science labs (Figure 8), and art and music classrooms (Figure 9).

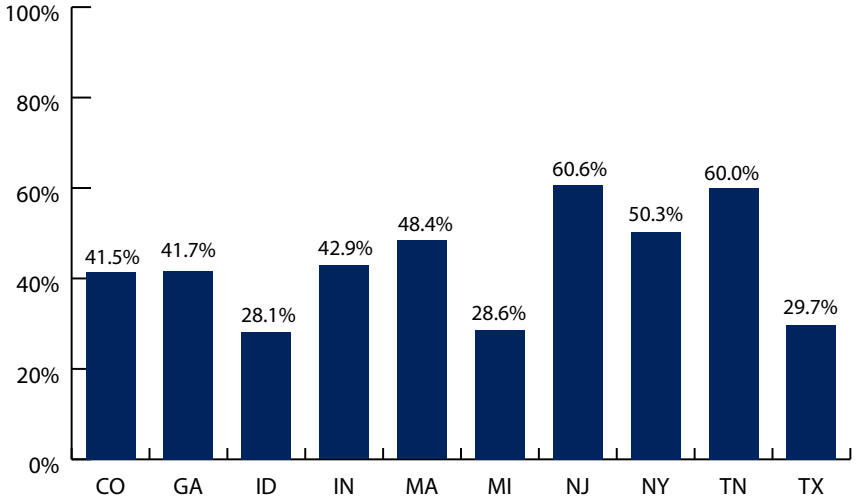
Figure 5. Percent of Charter Schools without Dedicated Library/Media Space



Dedicated libraries were defined as any space that was clearly separated (whether by walls or partitions) and identified by school staff as the library. Books lining hallway walls or bookshelves in the corner of a room, without partitions, were not considered a library for the purposes of this study. In cases where partitions were used, the area enclosed by the partition(s) was measured and recorded as the library[9].

9 If the partitioned space was within another room, such as a common area or an auditorium, the square footage of the library was subtracted from the square footage of the other space.

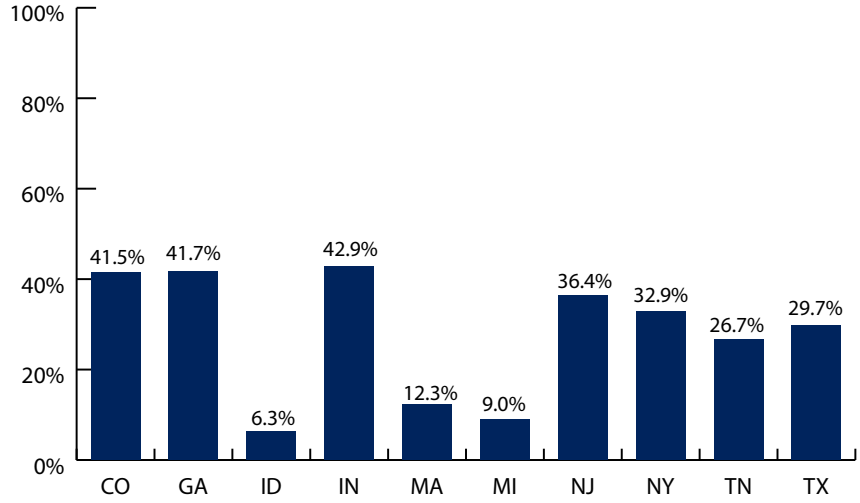
Figure 6. Percent of Charter Schools without a Dedicated Computer Lab



As with the library spaces, computer labs were defined as any space that was enclosed by walls (permanent or temporary) and identified by school staff as a computer lab. As the survey evolved, it also began asking whether schools had a mobile computer lab. As the survey did not ask about mobile labs in all ten states, Figure 7 shows the percentage of charters in each state that had at least one computer lab (either a physical lab or a mobile). Charter schools in Idaho, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, and Tennessee reported on whether they had any mobile computer labs[10].

10 Some charter schools have recently begun providing laptops or tablets to all students enrolled in the school. This was not considered in the survey for any of the ten states that have participated thus far, but will be considered in future iterations.

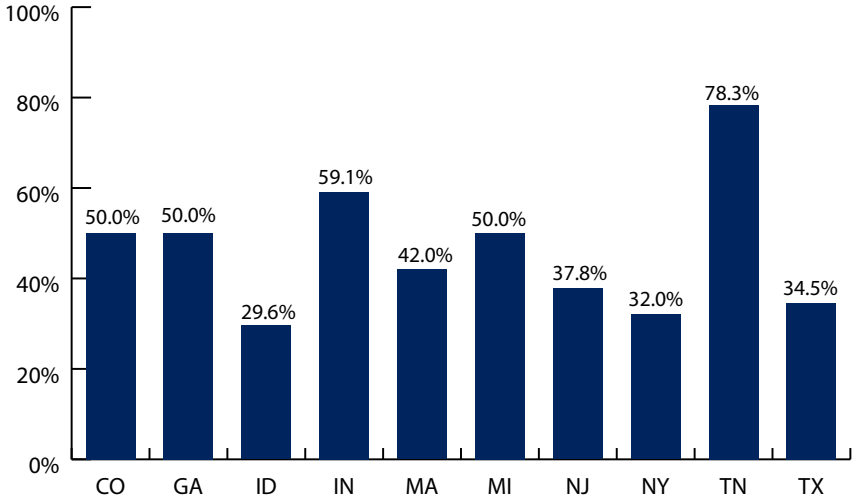
Figure 7. Percent of Charter Schools without Access to Either a Dedicated or Mobile Computer Lab



Note: No data on mobile computer labs was collected in CO, GA, IN, and TX. Thus, the figures for these for states likely overstate the percentage of charter schools that lack access to some type of computer lab.

When mobile labs are also considered the percentage of charter schools without computer labs drops considerably. For example, the percentage of charter schools without any computer lab drops from 28.1 to 6.3 percent in Indiana and from 48.4 to 12.3 percent in Massachusetts. Other states exhibited similar differences.

Figure 8. Percent of Secondary Charter Schools without a Dedicated Science Lab



The U.S. Department of Education has increased their emphasis on providing students with a high-quality science curriculum. Arguably, schools, secondary schools in particular, with dedicated science labs are better able to provide an in-depth science curriculum. Charter schools across the ten states surveyed, however, vary in the percentage of secondary schools that have dedicated science labs.

While these results do not consider the many charter schools that are designed with missions that do not center around the sciences (such as schools that focus on the arts) it does suggest that many charter schools may be opting to provide science instruction in classrooms that do not include lab space.

Figure 9. Percent of Charter Schools with Neither an Art nor Music Room

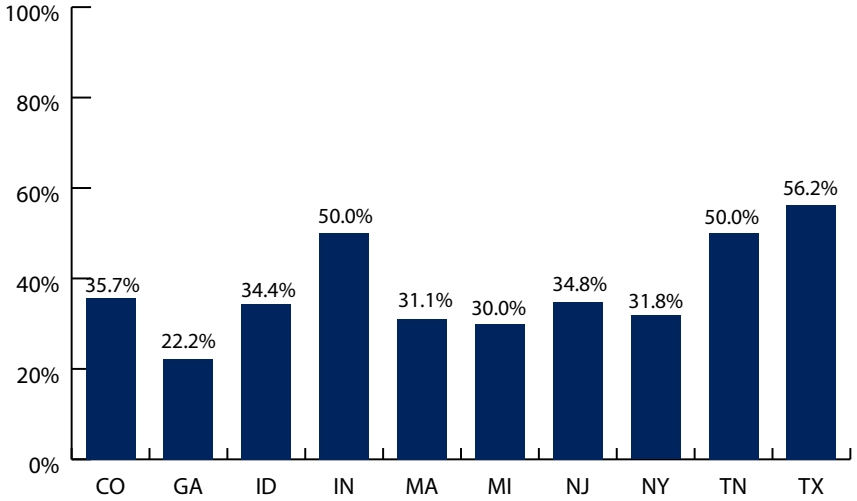


Figure 9 illustrates the percentage of charter schools in each state that had neither a dedicated art nor a dedicated music room. In three of the ten states (Indiana, Tennessee, and Texas) at least 50 percent of charter schools had neither. Whether these schools conducted art or music lessons in other instructional spaces could not be determined by the data collected in the facilities survey.

CONCLUSIONS ON CHARTER SCHOOL FACILITY SIZE

When compared to local and regional standards and practices for traditional district facilities, charter school facilities often appear smaller. Small facilities translate into classrooms that tend to be smaller than traditional public school classrooms and school facilities that lack one or more specialized instructional spaces.

One factor that could contribute to the smaller size of charter school facilities is cost. Because charter schools pay for facilities out of per-pupil operating funds, charter boards may choose to limit expenses by renting or purchasing buildings that are smaller than traditional schools.

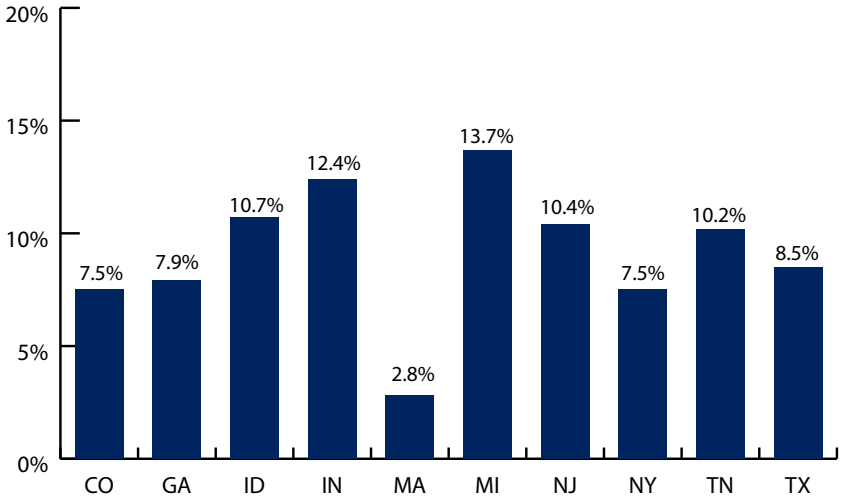
The next section (Charter School Facilities Spending) explores how much charter schools are spending on facilities. It also provides facilities spending information based on who owns the facility: the school, a school district, or a private entity.

CHARTER SCHOOL FACILITIES SPENDING

Percent of Dedicated Operational Revenue Spent on Charter School Facilities

On average, charter schools spend between 2.8 and 13.7 percent of their Per-Pupil Operating Revenue (PPOR) on facilities (see Figure 10). These figures include the costs associated with renting and owning the facilities. In some instances schools are able to "rent" facilities from school districts for little or no cost (for example $1 per year) and these cases are included in the analysis presented in Figure 10.

Figure 10. Total Facilities Expenditures as a Percentage of Per-Pupil Operating Revenue



When the facilities cost data is disaggregated by ownership type a more nuanced picture begins to develop. The following series of figures shows the relative percentage of PPOR spent by ownership type. "School owned" refers to charter school facilities that are owned by the school itself or a non-profit foundation or building corporation established on behalf of the school. "District owned" refers to charter school facilities that are owned by a school district[11]. "Privately owned" facilities are those that are owned by either a for-profit or a not-for-profit entity. These entities may or may not provide additional services to the charter but all of these charters schools pay rent for the use of the facility.[12] Table 3 shows the percentage of charter facilities classified under each ownership type.

11 Some districts provide facilities to charter schools with rental "payments" of $0 or $1 annually. These cases are still considered in the group of charters that rent and their "payments" are represented accordingly.

12 There were also some cases where two or more entities shared ownership of the school's facility. These facilities were not included in this analysis, as there was no consistent trend in the types of entities that tended to co-own (e.g., school and district, district and state, school and non-profit organization).

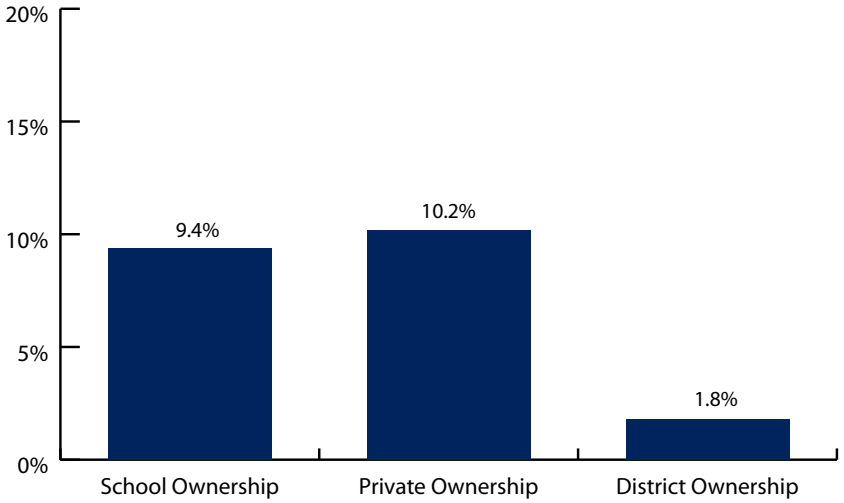
Table 3. Percent of Facilities in each State Owned by the Charter School, a Private Entity, or a School District[A]

State	CO	GA	ID	IN	MA	MI	NJ	NY	TN	TX
School Owned	45.6%	22.9%	34.1%	14.0%	33.3%	28.8%	15.0%	7.0%	11.1%	35.7%
Privately Owned	32.0%	51.4%	41.5%	76.0%	58.3%	66.4%	72.0%	39.5%	50.0%	44.5%
District Owned	10.7%	25.7%	17.1%	10.0%	0.0%	4.8%	11.0%	42.6%	16.7%	6.0%

A. Facilities owned by more than one of these entities, or mixed ownership facilities, are not included in this table.

Figure 11 provides the weighted average facilities spending as a percentage of PPOR for the total sample by ownership type. On average, charter schools that rent their facility from a private organization spend more (10.2 percent) than schools that own their facility (9.4 percent). Charter schools that rent the facility from a school district, however, only spend about two percent of their PPOR on rent.

Figure 11. Average Facilities Expenditures as a Percent of PPOR, by Ownership Type

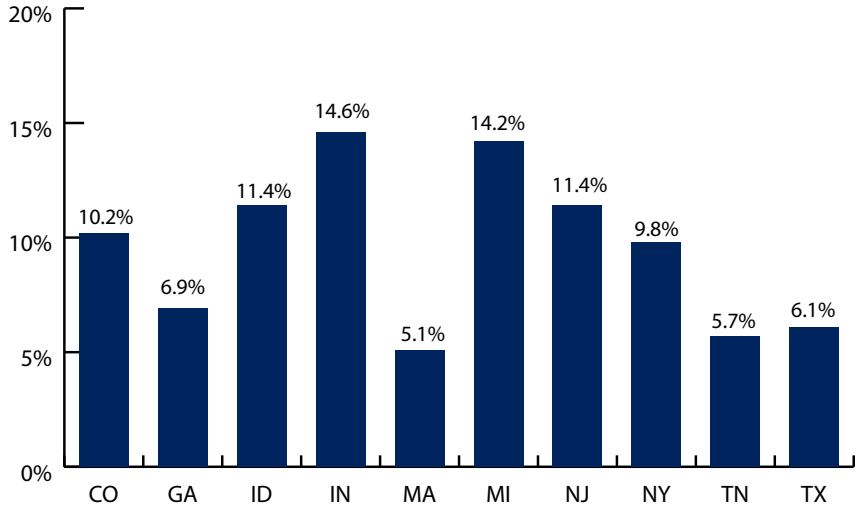


Interestingly, these average percentages do vary considerably between states. In some states, like Tennessee, private renters pay a much higher percentage than school owners. In other states, like Indiana, the findings were reversed with school owners paying a higher percentage of PPOR on facilities than charter schools that rent from a private entity. The following subsections outline the percent of PPOR spent on facilities by state and ownership type.

Percent of Per-Pupil Operating Revenue Spent on School Owned Facilities, by State

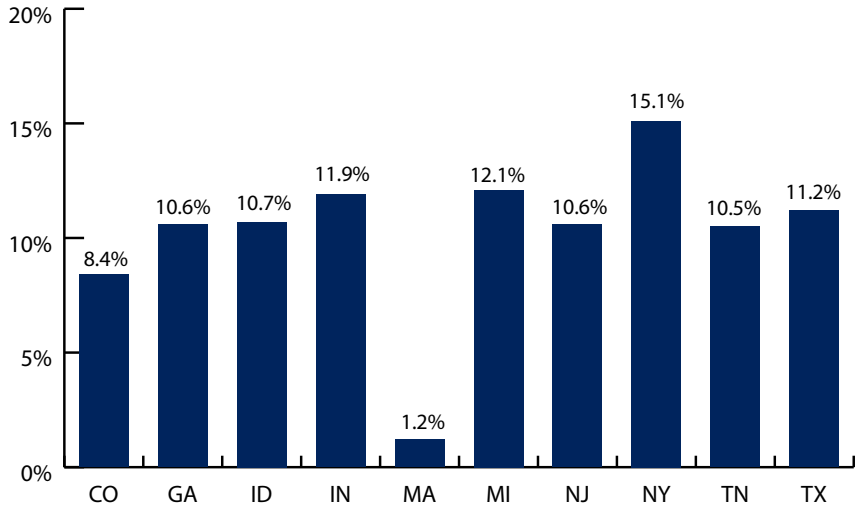
While the percent of PPOR spent for charter schools that owned their facility averaged 9.4 percent across all ten states, the averages within each state varied considerably. Figure 12 shows that the average percent of PPOR spent on facilities by school owners ranged from 5.1 percent in Massachusetts to 14.6 percent in Indiana.

Figure 12. Facilities Expenditures as a Percentage of PPOR – School Owned



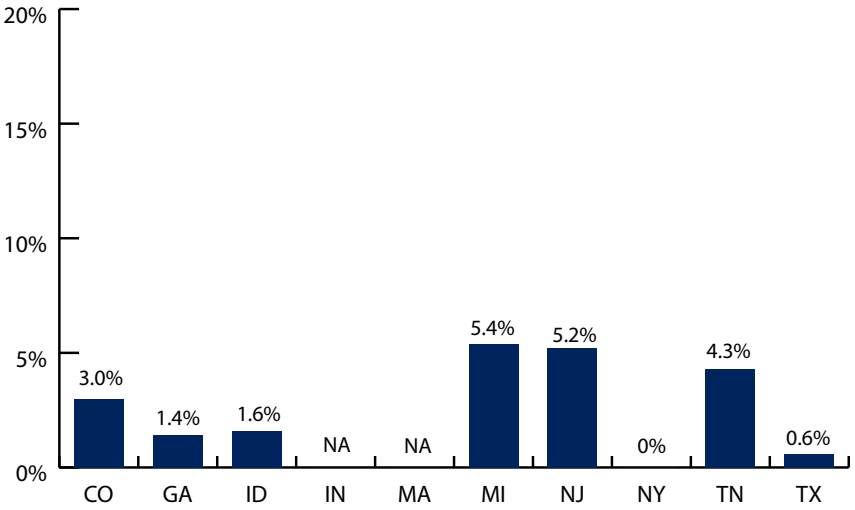
Similarly, charter schools renting from private entities had average per-pupil costs that consumed between one and 15 percent of per-pupil operating revenue (see Figure 13).

Figure 13. Facilities Expenditures as a Percentage of PPOR – Privately Owned



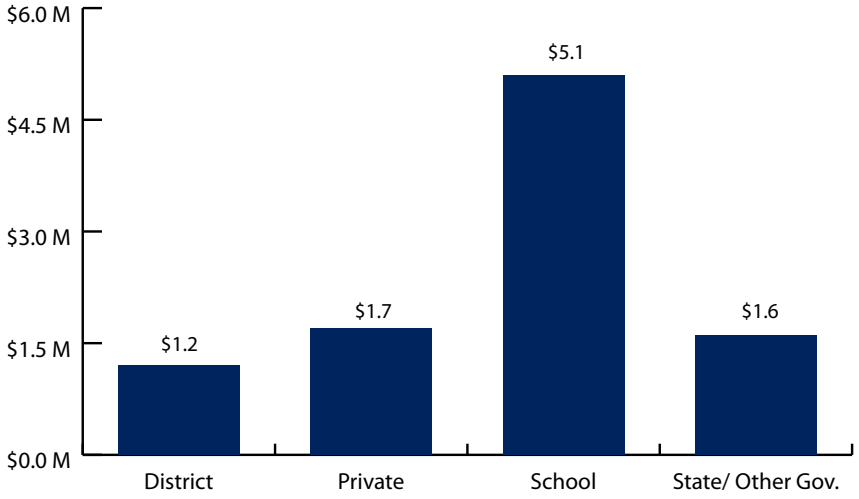
Charter schools renting the facility from school districts, on the other hand, often had no rental payments (Figure 14). Even for charter schools that did pay rent, the average percent of PPOR dedicated to rental payments was far less than the other charter schools in the same state.

Figure 14. Facilities Expenditures as a Percentage of PPOR – District Owned



It should be noted that charters renting from districts often have other facilities costs, including those associated with major renovations and repair work. However, even when considering the costs associated with capital projects over a five year period, charter schools in facilities owned by school districts have incurred fewer costs than charters that rent from private organizations, own their own facility, or rent from the state or other governmental organization.

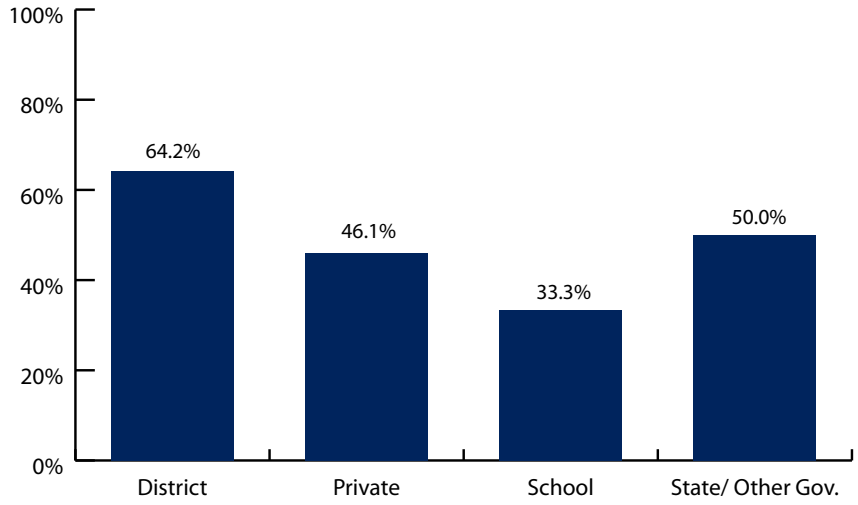
Figure 15. Average Capital Project Spending (in Millions) over Five Years[13]



Even though district owned charter school facilities tend to be older than facilities owned by other entities, they were more likely to have been originally constructed as schools (see Figures 16 and 17). Therefore, the cost of renovating or repairing district facilities was not as high as for other ownership types. Schools that own their facilities had the highest overall spending on capital projects. The fact that school owned facilities tend to be newer (66 percent were built after 1970) and were often originally built as schools (nearly 60 percent) suggests that many of the capital projects for school owned facilities were likely building purchases/new construction, rather than renovations or major repairs.

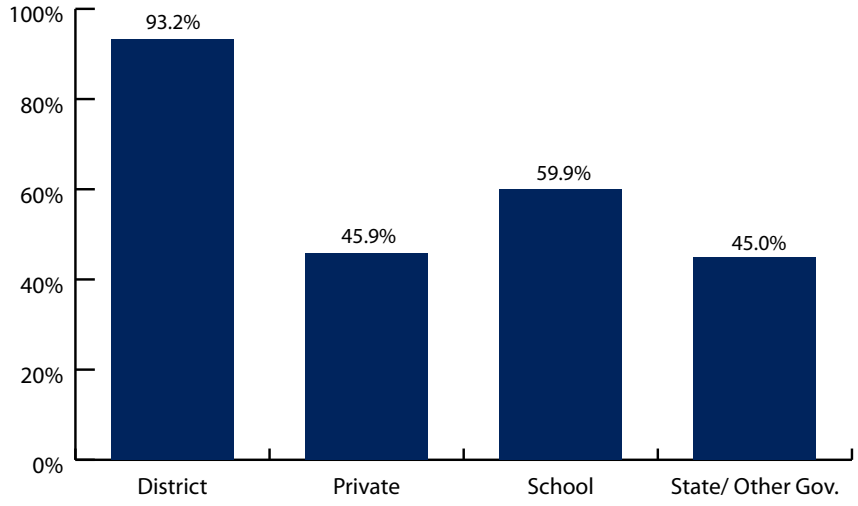
13 Charter school administrators were asked to report whether the facility had undergone any major capital projects (projects costing over $20,000) in the past five years. They were then asked to provide the amount spent on those projects, and from what sources. Given states completed the survey at different times, the five year period represent the five years prior to each schools' participation in the survey, not necessarily 2007-2012.

Figure 16. Percent of Charter Facilities Built Before 1970



Note: Colorado charter schools were not included in this analysis because the question regarding the year school facilities were built was not included in the Colorado survey.

Figure 17. Percent of Charter School Facilities that were Constructed as a School



CONCLUSIONS ON CHARTER SCHOOL FACILITIES SPENDING

Charter schools are spending a significant portion of their operating budgets on facilities. With the exception of charter schools in district facilities, the average charter school is spending over ten percent of funds—funds that could otherwise be spent on hiring additional teachers or purchasing curricular materials—on their facility. Additionally, charter schools are spending millions of dollars on capital projects to construct, purchase, renovate or repair their facilities.

The results from the ten states surveyed thus far seem to suggest that schools with access to district facilities spend far less on both annual rental payments and costs associated with capital projects. Yet, as shown in Table 3, charter schools housed in district facilities are the minority in every state, except New York.

How are charter schools paying for this? Do all funds come from per-pupil revenue alone? Can charter schools access the same facilities related grants and loans as traditional school districts?

These are the types of questions the Charter School Facilities Initiative is seeking to answer. The following section (Charter School Access to Facilities Funding) outlines whether state and local government agencies are providing charter schools the same access to the programs that are in place to assist traditional school districts with their capital needs.

CHARTER SCHOOL ACCESS TO FACILITIES FUNDING

Sources of Funding for Charter School Capital Projects

LOCAL TAX INITIATIVES

Public school districts with capital needs (constructing, repairing, or renovating school buildings) hold elections asking constituents to approve tax increases in order to fund specific capital projects. Charter schools are unable to do this and often have no access to voter approved tax revenues to help fund their capital needs. In fact, five of the ten states that have participated in the Charter School Facilities Initiative have specific statutory regulations that do not allow charters to access local tax revenue to fund facilities or capital projects.

For the other five states, districts can include charters' facility needs in their bond, mill levy, or sales tax referenda requests. However, results from the CSFI surveys suggest that this rarely occurs. Table 4 outlines a) whether state law allows charters to access local tax revenue, b) whether the authorizing district, or district of residence, has proposed a tax initiative for facility projects in the last five years (from when the survey was administered), and c) the percentage of charter schools that were asked to participate in the tax initiative, when held.

Table 4. Charter School Access to Local Tax Revenue for Facilities Funding, by State

State	CO	GA	ID	IN	MA	MI	NJ	NY	TN	TX
State Law Allows For Charter School Access to Local Tax Revenues	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Local Facilities Tax Initiative has been Proposed to Voters[A]	Yes	Yes	Yes	—	—	No	—	—	No	—
% of Charter Schools Invited to Participate in Local Tax Initiative[B]	68.6%	2.8%	6.3%	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

A. Initiatives must have been held in the charter school's authorizing district or district of residence, if authorized by an entity other than the district in which the charter is located.

B. Percent represents only charter schools that were in a district that did have a local facilities tax initiative.

Of the five states that allow for charter schools to access local tax revenue, two states had no districts with charter schools in their boundaries pursue a tax initiative. Of the three states where tax initiatives were proposed, very few charters were invited to participate in two of them (the number of invited charters in Georgia and Indiana combined was less than ten schools[14]).

Colorado is the only state in which a majority of charter schools were invited to participate in a local tax initiative, when their authorizing district proposed one. However, Colorado's Facility Survey was conducted in the 2007-2008 school year, just prior to the major economic downturn. While it is possible that Colorado's results reflect how districts would otherwise include charter schools in their tax initiatives in times of economic health, other state differences in local policies and attitudes toward the charter sector may also have an influence. The Colorado charter school landscape is one that is relatively charter friendly, compared to most states across the country.

14 It should be noted that the current economy has left many districts too shy to go to the voters to ask for tax increases; therefore, these results may be underestimating what districts would do in a different economic environment.

STATE FACILITIES FUNDING SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Each of the ten states has at least one statewide facility related funding support program for which charter schools can apply. State facilities funding support for charter schools can include: state grant programs, state loan programs, state, regional, and local bonding authorities, and/or credit enhancement programs. While each state does provide charter schools the opportunity to participate in one or more facilities funding support programs, the number to benefit from these programs appears to be limited (see Table 5).

Table 5. Charter School Access to State Facilities Funding Support, by State

State	CO	GA	ID	IN	MA	MI	NJ	NY	TN	TX
State Law Allows For Charter School Access to State Facilities Funding	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
No. of Charter School Facilities Reported to have Receiving State Funding[A]	4	22	1	6	5	0	0	20	1	0
No. of Charter School Facilities that Participated in the State Survey[B]	106	36	51	35	63	200	69	172	31	193

A. Includes any state facilities funding support received in the five years preceding the facilities survey.

B. The number of participants in the survey, rather than the number of schools reporting to have applied for support, is used because many schools appear to have skipped this section.

Table 5 outlines the number of charter schools that reported receiving some type of support from the state for facilities related funding. It should be noted that while these results appear to suggest that very few charters actually benefit from the state programs, the authors are not confident that all the data was captured accurately. Unfortunately, a large number of school facilities skipped this section in the survey. It cannot be assumed that school administrators skipped the questions because they did not apply for assistance. Therefore, these results may under estimate the number of charter schools to have benefited and/or applied.

CONCLUSIONS ON CHARTER SCHOOL ACCESS TO FACILITIES FUNDING

Preliminary results suggest that charter schools across the country have limited access to local and state resources for facilities related funding. However, economic and data collection issues may be skewing these results.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND MODEL LAWS

HOW STATEWIDE POLICIES MAY IMPACT CHARTER SCHOOL FACILITIES OUTCOMES

There are many options for addressing charter school facility challenges at the state level. However, resolving charter school facilities challenges remains a complex issue. 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 possible solutions to help ease charter school facilities 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 allow charters to have their own bonding authority.**
5. **A mechanism to provide credit enhancement for charter school facilities.**
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.**

States and local governments can provide revenue and other capital assets directly to public charter schools in order to ensure they have adequate facilities. Items #1, #2, and #6 above provide facility revenue options that can be considered. While not as critical as revenue, the other policy solutions listed above (#3, #4, #5, #7, and #8) may also prove helpful to charter schools.

Accordingly, individual states have addressed the facilities challenges facing charter schools in different ways. (See Appendix E for a detailed description of how some states have implemented different Model Laws). Table 6 reviews the model law policies and practices in each of the participating states at the time the Facilities Survey was administered. A check mark indicates that the law is in place. A check minus indicates that the law is in place but that either the implementation of the law is weak or that there is still a gap between what is provided and what is needed.

Table 6. Review of Model Law Related Legislation in Place in Each State (at the time the survey was administered) from the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

State	CO	GA	ID	IN	MA	MI	NJ	NY	TN	TX
1. An annual per-pupil facilities allowance that 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 allow charters to have their own bonding authority	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓–	✓–	✓
5. A mechanism to provide credit enhancement for charter school facilities	✓			✓						✓
6. Equal access to existing 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 schools								✓–		

Changes in the number of state model law provisions within a state appear to help reduce the facilities challenges experienced by charter schools within that a state. Partly as a result of the data available on charter school facilities and spending, Colorado has addressed additional model law provisions over the past few years. Since the publication of *Shortchanged Charters: How Funding Disparities Hurt Colorado's Charter Schools*, in 2008, 18 charter schools have been awarded funding through the BEST grant program (a competitive state grant program open to all public schools, including charter schools that meet certain eligibility requirements). BEST funding can be used for an assortment of capital needs, with five charter schools opening brand new facilities as a result of BEST awards. Additionally, through an annual legislative appropriation charter schools have access to the Charter School Capital Construction Funding. Funding through the Charter School Capital Construction program is available on a per-pupil basis and may be used to for a variety of charter school capital needs including construction, demolition, remodeling, financing, purchasing or leasing of land, buildings or facilities. With backing from the Colorado League of Charter Schools, the appropriation to the Charter School Capital Construction Funding in the 2012 legislative session was increased from five to six million dollars. Finally, due to state policy changes since 2008 Colorado charter schools have been better able to access empty or underutilized district facilities.

CONCLUSIONS ON POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND MODEL LAWS

As this report demonstrates, states continue to struggle with helping public charter schools resolve their facilities-related challenges. Even the states with relatively broad sets of policy solutions in place (such as Colorado) still have unresolved charter school facilities issues. However, an increasing number of states realize that they have to address these issues in order to create high-quality charter school sectors. As states continue to implement the policy recommendations and model laws discussed in this report, charter schools should be able to widen their programming options, increase the quality of student educational experiences, and provide more seats to help reduce the number of waitlisted students.

APPENDIX A

School Facility Standards

The process for developing facility standards began with published regional and national new school construction data and then incorporated each state's standards, when available. This data is typically based on enrollments that average between 500 and 1,200 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. Standards were also compared to some state and district standards to verify validity. Standards for schools with enrollments of 200, 500, and 800 students are shown in the table on page 31. Standards were modified for schools with identified educational programs including Montessori, Expeditionary Learning, Arts, and STEM.

Overall Facilities Size Standards (Square Feet Per Student)

		Grades K-5	Grades K-8	Grades K-12	Grades 6-8	Grades 6-12	Grades 9-12
Colorado	200 Students	146	151	162	177	192	159
	500 Students	130	138	153	170	186	152
	800 Students	113	125	144	164	179	144
Georgia	200 Students	155	160	166	176	183	169
	500 Students	138	146	156	169	177	159
	800 Students	122	132	147	163	172	149
Idaho	200 Students	149	153	163	156	177	190
	500 Students	130	139	154	151	170	183
	800 Students	112	125	144	144	163	176
Indiana	200 Students	161	164	171	181	192	168
	500 Students	138	146	160	174	186	158
	800 Students	115	128	148	167	179	148
Massachusetts	200 Students	172	177	182	185	193	201
	500 Students	146	156	169	171	185	194
	800 Students	121	135	157	157	176	187
Michigan	200 Students	149	153	163	156	177	190
	500 Students	130	139	154	151	170	183
	800 Students	112	125	144	144	163	176
New Jersey	200 Students	166	168	170	172	177	184
	500 Students	142	149	159	161	171	179
	800 Students	117	130	149	149	164	173
New York	200 Students	171	176	176	181	185	190
	500 Students	146	155	165	171	178	184
	800 Students	120	135	154	157	171	179
Tennessee	200 Students	155	158	166	166	179	191
	500 Students	134	142	156	156	172	185
	800 Students	114	126	146	148	166	179
Texas	200 Students	157	160	166	169	178	188
	500 Students	135	144	156	159	172	182
	800 Students	113	128	146	150	165	176

APPENDIX B

Site Standards

Site standards were derived from the gross square footage standards described in Appendix A 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 to ensure their validity. Site size standards are shown in the table on page 33 for three different enrollment levels.

Site Standards (Acres) used for each state

		Grades K-5	Grades K-8	Grades K-12	Grades 6-8	Grades 6-12	Grades 9-12
Colorado	200 Students	4.5	5.3	5.5	5.3	5.3	5.5
	500 Students	10.0	12.0	12.3	12.3	12.5	13.0
	800 Students	14.0	17.5	19.3	18.8	19.3	20.3
Georgia	200 Students	3.8	4.8	5.3	5.3	5.3	5.3
	500 Students	8.5	11.0	12.3	12.0	12.5	12.5
	800 Students	12.0	15.8	18.5	18.3	19.5	19.5
Idaho	200 Students	4.4	5.1	5.2	4.6	5.1	5.7
	500 Students	7.6	11.5	12.1	10.9	12.3	13.7
	800 Students	13.2	16.5	18.1	16.7	18.8	12.2
Indiana	200 Students	6.3	7.5	7.3	7.0	6.5	6.3
	500 Students	13.5	16.5	16.8	16.3	15.8	15.0
	800 Students	18.0	23.3	24.8	24.5	24.0	23.3
Massachusetts	200 Students	3.9	4.7	4.6	4.6	4.5	4.5
	500 Students	8.2	10.4	10.6	10.6	10.8	10.9
	800 Students	10.9	14.3	15.7	15.6	16.5	16.9
Michigan	200 Students	4.4	5.1	5.2	4.6	5.1	5.7
	500 Students	7.6	11.5	12.1	10.9	12.3	13.7
	800 Students	13.2	16.5	18.1	16.7	18.8	12.2
New Jersey	200 Students	4.2	5.5	5.3	5.2	5.2	5.4
	500 Students	9.0	12.1	12.4	12.2	12.4	13.2
	800 Students	11.9	17.0	18.5	18.2	19.1	20.4
New York	200 Students	3.8	3.5	3.8	3.3	3.8	4.0
	500 Students	8.0	8.0	8.8	7.3	7.8	7.0
	800 Students	10.5	11.0	13.0	10.8	13.5	14.8
Tennessee	200 Students	4.2	5.1	4.9	4.9	4.8	4.7
	500 Students	9.0	11.4	11.6	11.5	11.5	11.5
	800 Students	12.2	16.2	17.3	17.2	17.7	17.8
Texas	200 Students	5.0	6.0	5.8	5.3	5.5	5.5
	500 Students	10.5	13.3	13.3	12.0	13.0	13.3
	800 Students	14.0	18.8	20.0	18.3	20.0	20.5

APPENDIX C

General Classroom Standards

General classroom standards, based on square footage per student, are shown in the table below. These standards were derived from standards used in other states and districts and standards established by the any local data and/or standards, 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.

General Classroom Standards
(Square Feet per Student) used for each State

State	CO	GA	ID	IN	MA	MI	NJ	NY	TN	TX
ECE/Pre-K	58	58	NA	52	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	45
Kindergarten	41	41	41	39	60	41	45	45	41	41
Grades 1-6	35	35	34	32	37	34	39	35	33	33
Grades 7-8	30	30	29	29	34	29	35	30	30	29
Grades 9-12	32	32	30	30	34	30	31	30	30	29

APPENDIX D

Specialized Instructional Space Standards

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 using a process similar to the one used for general classrooms. 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.

Standards used for Specialized Instructional Spaces: Gymnasiums, Science Labs, Art Classrooms, Libraries and Lunch Rooms

	CO	GA	ID	IN	MA	MI	NJ	NY	TN	TX
Gymnasium (total sq.ft)										
Elem.	3,000	4,000	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000
Middle	8,680	9,000	5,400	7,000	5,400	5,400	5,400	5,400	5,400	5,400
High	9,912	12,000	7,300	10,000	7,300	7,300	7,300	7,300	7,300	7,300
Science lab (sq.ft./student)										
Elem.	38	45	40	40	40	40	40	42	40	40
Middle	40	50	44	42	48	44	54	50	44	48
High	44	56	48	44	52	48	54	50	48	54
Art classroom (sq.ft./student)										
Elem.	35	40	38	35	40	38	30	40	38	40
Middle	40	48	44	46	50	44	35	45	44	48
High	46	56	50	50	50	50	43	45	50	56
Library										
Elem.	NA	NA	500sf + (2.5* enrollment)	1000sf or (25* (FTE/10))	500sf + (2.5* enrollment)	500sf + (2.5* enrollment)	500sf + 3.39* enrollment	500sf + (2.5* enrollment)	500sf + (2.5* enrollment)	(1400sf + (4* (FTE - 100)) * .75
Middle				1200sf or (25* (FTE/10))			500sf + 3.89* enrollment			(3000sf + (3* (FTE - 500)) * .75
High				1200sf or (25* (FTE/10))			500sf + 4.99* enrollment			(7500sf + (2* (FTE- 2000))* .75
Lunch room										
Elem.	NA	NA	4.75sf * (1/3 enrollment)	4.75 sf* (1/3 enrollment)	4.75sf * (1/3 enrollment)	4.75sf * (1/3 enrollment)	750sf or 5* enrollment, whichever is larger	4.75sf * (1/3 enrollment)	4.75sf * (1/3 enrollment)	4.75sf * (1/3 enrollment)
Middle										
High			4.9sf * (1/3 enrollment)	4.9sf * (1/3 enrollment)	4.9sf * (1/3 enrollment)	4.9sf * (1/3 enrollment)			4.9sf * (1/3 enrollment)	4.9sf * (1/3 enrollment)

APPENDIX E

Examples of How the Model Laws Have Been Implemented

PROVIDING DIRECT FACILITIES FUNDING TO PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS ON A PER-PUPIL BASIS

Washington D.C. provides public charter schools with approximately $2,800 in per-pupil facilities funding. Massachusetts law requires the state department of education to provide, subject to appropriation, funding to charter schools for a portion of the per-pupil capital needs component included in the charter tuition amount (for fiscal 2012 the per-pupil capital needs component was $893). Tennessee law provides a small amount of per-pupil facilities funding (approximately $215 to $315 per student).

PROVIDING GRANTS AND LOANS TO PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS TO SUPPORT THEIR FACILITIES COSTS

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 million. Washington D.C. also has such a loan program which is currently capitalized at over $30 million. Indiana law established the charter school facilities assistance program to make grants to public charter schools (the state contributed $17 million to this program in 2011).

ENHANCED PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL ACCESS TO BONDS

Connecticut has provided $20 million in bond financing to support public charter school facilities, dispersed through a competitive application process. Michigan law provides that charters sponsored by school districts can access district bond levy funds for facilities (as determined by their charter). Michigan law also provides that all charter schools are eligible to access tax-exempt financing and technical assistance through the Michigan Public Educational Facilities Authority's bond and loan programs. New Jersey law provides charter schools access to tax-exempt bonds from the New Jersey Economic Development Authority. Idaho law provides that public charter schools are eligible for tax-exempt facilities financing using Nonprofit Facilities Revenue Bonds issued by the Idaho Housing and Financing Association. Massachusetts law allows charter schools to access tax-exempt bond financing for capital projects through the Massachusetts Development Finance Agency. Colorado law provides that the Educational and Cultural Facility Authority may issue bonds on behalf of charter schools.

CREATING A MECHANISM TO PROVIDE CREDIT ENHANCEMENT FOR PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL FACILITIES

Colorado provides a mechanism for limited credit enhancement for eligible, highly rated bond transactions for public charter schools by using the state's moral obligation to back $400 million in debt. In addition, Texas allows open-enrollment public charter schools that have an investment grade rating and meet certain financial criteria to apply to have their bonds guaranteed by the Permanent School Fund. This has resulted in charter bonds being backed by the full, faith, and credit of the state, putting public charter schools on par with school districts and allowing them to achieve higher ratings.

IMPROVED ACCESS TO SURPLUS DISTRICT SPACE

Indiana law requires school districts to provide a list of buildings that are closed, unused, or unoccupied for a period of two years to the state department of education and make them available for lease or purchase to any public charter school. If a public 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 public charter school's discretion or sell the building for $1. The public charter school is required to use the building for classroom instruction no later than two years after acquiring the building. If during the term of the lease, the public charter school closes or ceases using the school building for instruction, the building will be placed again on the state department of education's list.

Charter School Facilities Initiative: Initial Findings from Ten States was prepared by
the Colorado League of Charter Schools and the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.