

# SHORTCHANGED CHARTERS:

HOW FUNDING DISPARITIES  
HURT GEORGIA'S CHARTER SCHOOLS



AUGUST | 2011



COLORADO LEAGUE of  
CHARTER SCHOOLS  
*focus on achievement*



*This report was created as a collaboration by the above organizations.*

## INTRODUCTION

THE GEORGIA CHARTER SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION, the Colorado League of Charter Schools, and the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools have published this report entitled *"Shortchanged Charters: How Funding Disparities Hurt Georgia's Charter Schools."* This report details the state of charter school facilities in Georgia.

In fall 2010, the above three organizations worked to collect evidence that would accurately portray both the adequacy of charter school facilities (compared to standards derived from Georgia Department of Education standards, regional standards, and typical new school construction standards) and the average spending for facilities out of charter schools' operating budgets. Collectively, the results described in this report will help drive the Georgia Charter Schools Association's policy agenda, and provide further evidence that charter school students in Georgia are not treated equitably.

In order to ensure that the policy recommendations of this effort were research-based and supported by reliable data, Hutton Architecture Studio—a leader in educational facilities architecture—consulted on the project to provide a set of reasonable expectations for school facilities' size and amenities. The Colorado League of Charter Schools ("the League") is the pioneering organization behind the creation and development of the facilities survey. The League worked closely with the Georgia Charter Schools Association ("GCSA") to collect and analyze the data to produce this report.

This report is based on survey, enrollment, and operating revenue data collected during the 2010-2011 school year. Results are based on the survey responses from 37 (82 percent) of Georgia's independent "start-up" charter schools.





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Key findings include:

- **Charter schools are the only public schools in the state of Georgia forced to spend operating revenue on facilities.**
  - On average, charter schools in Georgia spend \$631 per student from designated per-pupil operating revenue on facilities costs. For the average charter school in Georgia, with enrollment of 373 students, this translates into \$235,363—**enough to hire more than 5<sup>1</sup> additional teachers.**
  - Removing HB-555 schools (those that are using district facilities without cost) from the analysis, the average facility spending rises to \$834 per student or almost 11 percent of per-pupil operating revenue.
- **Most Georgia charter schools have limited capacity to serve federally-subsidized meals for students from lower-income families.**
  - Over 60 percent of Georgia charter schools surveyed do not have kitchen facilities that qualify the school to provide federally-subsidized free and reduced price meals for students from low-income families.
- **Georgia charter school facilities are too small.**
  - Almost one-half (45.1 percent) of Georgia charter school students are in facilities that are at least 20 percent smaller than the Georgia total facility standard. Students in these schools are likely to attend classes in smaller classrooms and/or the facilities do not have the specialized instructional spaces such as a library, science lab, art, or music room that are part of a comprehensive educational program.

1 Average salary for charter school teachers in Georgia is \$46,526.

- **State grant funding for public school facilities has provided insufficient benefit for charters.**
  - During fiscal years 2008 through 2010, Georgia charter schools requested almost \$33 million in state grant funding. Only 17 percent, \$5.6 million was awarded. Even in fiscal year 2011 when grant applications and awards were limited to \$100,000, only 55 percent of the dollars requested by charter schools were awarded.
- **Local E-SPLOST referenda are not a significant source of funding for charter school facilities.**
  - Through 2010, only one Georgia charter school has been approved to receive facilities funds through an E-SPLOST referendum.
- **Not all districts are willing to share unused land or facilities with charter schools.**
  - Seventy-five percent of Georgia charter schools are not in district facilities, and one-third of these schools report unused district facilities nearby. To date, no charter school request to use one of these empty facilities has been approved.
- **Physical education and recreational options are limited for Georgia charter school students.**
  - More than 47 percent of Georgia charter schools do not have their own athletic fields or access to nearby athletic fields.
  - Twenty-nine percent of Georgia charter schools with elementary grades do not have their own playground or access to a nearby playground.
  - Nearly 17 percent of Georgia charter schools report not having a gymnasium.

In spite of the facilities challenges faced by Georgia charter schools, these schools are in high demand as evidenced by over 3,000 children on waiting lists to enter these schools. In addition, the Georgia Department of Education's *2009-10 Annual Report on Georgia's Charter Schools* shows that charter schools in Georgia have been performing as well as, if not better than, other public schools in the state for the last four years .

2 See [http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/pea\\_charter.aspx](http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/pea_charter.aspx) (annual reports are located on top right-hand side of webpage).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background.....2

Key Findings .....4

    Charter schools spend operating dollars on facilities .....4

    Charter schools have limited capacity to serve meals to lower-income students .....6

    Charter school classrooms are too small .....7

    State grant funding has little benefit to charter schools .....8

    Local E-SPLOST referenda are not a reliable funding source .....9

    Not all districts are willing share unused space with charter schools.....9

    Charter schools taking advantage of HB-555 are benefitting greatly .....9

    Charter school physical education and recreation space is limited ..... 10

Additional Evidence:

The Lack of Facilities Funding for Charter Schools  
has a Negative Impact..... 11

Conclusions.....13

Appendices: .....15

Appendix A.....15

    Methodology.....15

Appendix B.....17

    School Facility Standards.....17

## BACKGROUND

### Facilities Initiative Background

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

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

### Facilities Initiative Partnership

Seeing the success of the Colorado facilities initiative, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (“the Alliance”) partnered with the League to use the Colorado facilities survey model in other states to assess the charter facilities landscape across the country. The League and the Alliance, working in conjunction with the Georgia Charter Schools Association (“GCSA”) to collect and analyze the data, produced the following report.

### Charter Schools in Georgia

Georgia’s charter school statute was enacted in 1993, but only for conversion charter schools—schools that converted from traditional public schools to public charter schools. The state’s first charter schools opened in 1995. It was not until 1998 that Georgia’s charter school law was restructured to include independent “start-up” charter schools. Since then, the numbers have grown to 171 charter schools serving nearly 74,000 students (equaling 4 percent of Georgia’s K-12 public school enrollment for 2010-11). The numbers represent a variety of charter school types, including independent start-ups, commission, state chartered special schools, conversion, LEA start-up, and system charters.

### **Charter School Facilities in Georgia**

Georgia law does not provide independent start-up charter schools with access to local public school facilities or facilities funding. Therefore, independent start-up charters are at a disadvantage when compared to the other types of charters and other public schools. Independent start-up charters do not have access to either adequate public school buildings or sufficient funding for the purchase or lease of an adequate facility. Georgia's law essentially puts the burden of obtaining and paying for facilities on the independent charter schools themselves. As a result, independent charter schools have struggled to find suitable and affordable facilities.

Each year, the GCSA performs a needs assessment survey and, routinely, its member schools identify access to quality facilities as being their top challenge.

Due to the special circumstance of the independent start-up charter schools in Georgia, the study described in this report focused on those schools alone. Following the Colorado model, all independent charters were asked to complete an extensive and thorough survey asking about their facilities (see Appendix A for a detailed description of the survey). GCSA led this data collection effort, and provided supplemental data on school enrollment and funding. Eighty-two percent of Georgia's independent charter schools completed the survey between October and December of 2010.

The standards cited throughout this report were identified using either Georgia state standards, when available, or a set of derived standards based on Georgia standards, regional standards, or national best practices (see Appendix B for a more detailed description). To ensure accuracy in data collection and interpretation, the League consulted with two industry experts; Paul Hutton, a leader in school facilities construction and Wayne Eckerling Ph.D., an expert on charter schools, facilities planning, research, and bond planning and implementation.

## KEY FINDINGS

### **Charter schools are the only public schools in Georgia that are forced to spend operating funds on facilities.**

Charter schools are among the few public schools in Georgia that spend per-pupil operating revenue to cover the costs of their facilities. Most districts finance new school facilities through capital outlay funds, bonds, and E-SPLOST (Special Purpose, Local Option Sales Tax for educational purposes, including facilities). However, charter schools rarely get access to these financing mechanisms. As a result, charter schools across Georgia are forced to spend operating dollars on their facilities needs. In many cases, this results in a drop in the funding available for operating expenses to a level significantly below comparable school revenue.

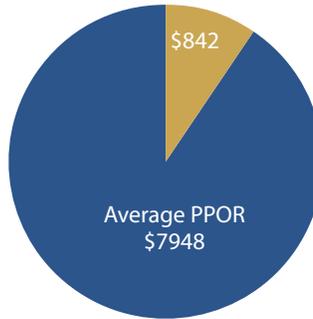
Results from the facilities survey and Georgia's 2010 per-pupil revenue data indicate the following:

- On average, charter schools in Georgia spend \$631 per student from designated operating revenue on facilities costs.
- For schools renting space that figure is \$842.
- However, for schools that have purchased or built buildings they now own, the figure decreases to \$552.
- For the six charter schools included in the survey taking advantage of HB-555, no lease, mortgage or bond costs were reported.
  - Exclusion of these schools drives the average per-student cost for the remainder of Georgia's charter schools to \$834.

**Average Facilities Costs as a Percentage of Per-Pupil Operating Revenue (PPOR) for Charter Schools that Rent their Facilities**

Average state PPOR of \$7948.

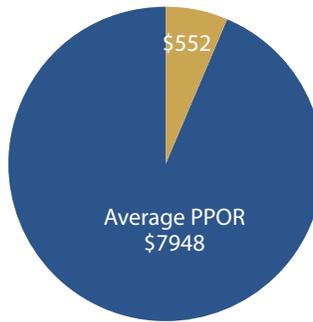
Average charter school per-pupil expenditure for facilities of \$842.



**Average Facilities Costs as a Percentage of Per-Pupil Operating Revenue (PPOR) for Charter Schools that Own their Facilities.**

Average state PPOR of \$7948.

Average charter school per-pupil expenditure for facilities of \$552.



Adding to the financial burden is that 66 percent of Georgia charters have undertaken a major capital project in the last five years. One-half of these schools have used operating funds to help finance these projects. Per-pupil operating revenue is also one of the likely sources for the up-front funds needed to initiate a long-term bond program, further reducing the funds available for classroom instruction.

**Most Georgia charter schools have limited capacity to serve federally-subsidized meals for students from lower-income families.**

Cafeteria facilities are commonly considered a “given” in public school buildings. In the world of charter schools, however, kitchen facilities are a luxury that the majority of Georgia charter schools are forced to do without. Whether in a new school building or a commercial facility that has been converted into functional educational space, the cost of adding a federally-compliant kitchen is prohibitive when taken out of operating expenses. Without a formal, federally-approved kitchen, charter schools struggle financially to meet the needs of lower-income students.

On average, forty-six percent of Georgia charter school students qualify for free and reduced priced meals. However, less than forty percent (38.9%) of Georgia’s charter schools have kitchen facilities that meet federal standards to serve free and reduced price meals. According to GCSA, schools providing a free and reduced lunch program without federally-approved kitchen facilities must seek other sources for meals, such as external catering, often at costs far in excess of the federally-subsidized rates—further eating into operational dollars.



### **Georgia charter school facilities are too small.**

Results from the survey found that Georgia charter school buildings and classrooms are considerably smaller than the standards used for this study. This is true even for charter schools that have recently built new schools buildings.

- Almost one-half (45 percent) of charter schools have facilities where the total square footage, per-pupil, is at least 20 percent smaller than Georgia standards.
- Nearly half (49 percent) of charter school classrooms in Georgia are at least 20 percent smaller than standards used in this study.
- Eighty-one percent of charter schools are on sites that are more than 20 percent smaller than called for by Georgia standards or standards derived directly from them. These facilities with inadequate sites serve more than 89 percent of Georgia's charter school students.

When total facility size is too small, charter schools are challenged to provide the same quality instructional spaces that are enjoyed by other public school students; such as a library, computer labs, or a space exclusively used for a gymnasium or lunch room. Even when these specialized instructional spaces are present, they frequently do not meet the size standard. Results from the 2010 Georgia Facilities survey bear this out and are reviewed on pages 11-12 of this report.



**Charter schools in Georgia are 20 percent smaller than Georgia's School Facility Standards.**

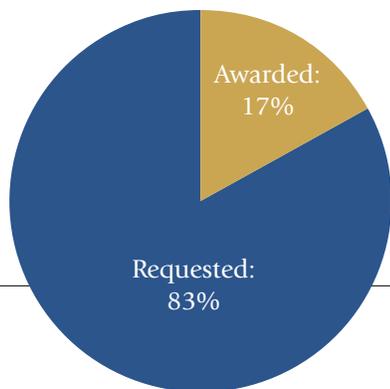
**Charter school classrooms in Georgia are 20 percent smaller than regional and typical new school construction standards.**

**State grant funding for public school facilities has provided little benefit for charters.**

In 2000, the Georgia General Assembly instituted a facilities fund, accessed via a competitive grant process. Successful applicants may utilize these grant funds to satisfy capital needs, such as purchasing property, furnishings, and/or equipment, or for repairs and renovation. As reported in the executive summary of this report, only 17 percent of state grant funding requested by charter schools was awarded for fiscal years 2008 through 2010. Even the highest rated projects received only limited funding. For example, in fiscal year 2009, the four schools earning more than a 90 percent on the grant application review requested over \$4 million in state grants, but only received about \$630,000.

Beginning in fiscal year 2010, facilities grants over \$100,000 are no longer being considered. Without additional funding sources, this makes it even more challenging for charter schools to address their facility inadequacies through renovating entire buildings, purchasing larger facilities, and/or constructing facility additions. The \$100,000 cap limits the scope of facility issues that can be addressed through state grants to small maintenance, repair, and small renovation projects. Even with this limited funding, only 54 percent of the grant amounts requested by charter schools was awarded in 2010-11.

**Percentage of Requested Funds Awarded to Charters through the Georgia Charter School Facilities Grant Program, 2008-2010.**



Amount charters requested: \$24,662,797  
Amount charters were awarded: \$5,220,000



**Local E-SPLOST referenda are not a significant source of funding for charter school facilities.**

In 1996, the Georgia General Assembly, via HB-1065, expanded ways in which local boards of education (“LBOEs”) could appeal to voters to support capital projects for schools. In addition to voting for bond obligations via property tax increases, LBOEs could ask voters to support capital projects through an education special purpose local option sales tax (“E-SPLOST”) referendum. As public schools, charter schools’ capital needs can, and should, be taken into consideration when LBOEs are going to the voters for E-SPLOST requests. In 2008, this law was revised to clarify that charter schools may be included. However;

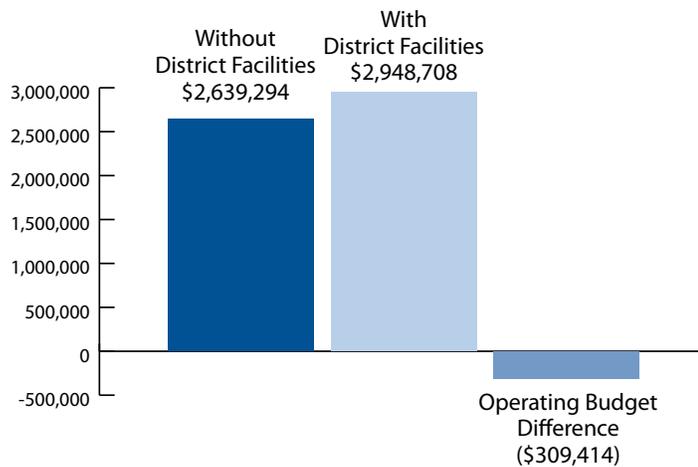
- Through 2010, only one charter school has been approved to receive facilities funding through an E-SPLOST referendum.

**Charter schools that are taking advantage of HB-555 are benefitting greatly.**

In 2009, the Georgia General Assembly revised HB-555 to include a provision that required districts to allow charter schools access to their unused facilities. Through the 2010-2011 school years, however, only 25 percent of charter schools have been able to gain access to unused space. Of the remaining schools, one-third report unused district facilities nearby. While the majority of these charter schools have asked permission to access unused district facilities, not one request has been granted to date.

- An average sized charter school with the use of a district facility has over \$308,000 in revenue that can be reallocated from facility costs to classroom instruction compared to a charter school that must rent or purchase space.

**Difference in the Operating Budgets for Average Sized Charters\* with and without the Use of District Facilities, via HB-555.**



### Physical education and recreational options are limited.

Physical education and opportunities to participate in sports, both in extracurricular activities and during school time, are an important component of any student's educational program. According to the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, "Physical education in school provides the best opportunity for a child to learn and develop lifelong health and fitness skills. Without opportunities for school physical education, many children have no access to safe, supervised physical activity of any kind." However, gymnasiums dedicated to physical education and safe, functional athletic fields are, for many charter schools, an important component of the students' overall educational program they must do without.



- While 83 percent of charter schools in Georgia have a gymnasium on-site, only 52 percent of these were originally built as gymnasiums. Fifty-eight percent of charter schools also use their gymnasium space as a lunch room. Both situations impact the types of physical activities charter schools can offer and the regularity in which they can offer them.
- Only 39 percent of charter schools have an athletic field. Of those with athletic fields, 50 percent report that the field is inadequate for normal activities or is not covered by grass.
- More than 29 percent of charter schools with elementary grades do not have a playground or access to one for students to play on during recess, lunch, and before and after school. Two-thirds do not have an isolated playground space for their youngest students.

## ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE: THE LACK OF FACILITIES FUNDING FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS HAS A NEGATIVE IMPACT

### School Environment

Recent studies demonstrate a link between the quality of the physical environment within a school facility and educational outcomes. Facility characteristics that are believed to have an impact on student learning are: acoustics, access to views through windows, presence of natural day lighting, thermal comfort, and indoor air quality. Questions within the survey asked charter school leaders to rate their schools on these aspects. Selected relevant findings follow:

- Thirty-six percent of Georgia charter school respondents strongly disagree or disagree that, 'Most classrooms/instructional spaces have enough natural day-lighting, sufficient to occasionally turn off electric lights.'
- Thirty-six percent of Georgia charter school respondents strongly disagree or disagree that, 'Most classrooms/instructional spaces have windows permitting views of the outside.'
- Twenty-seven percent of Georgia charter school respondents report, '... air quality problems due to mold or mildew.'
- More than 30 percent of Georgia charter school respondents report that, 'Noise generated from other classrooms or corridors is disruptive in the classrooms.'
- Twenty-six percent of Georgia charter school respondents strongly disagree or disagree or that, 'The temperature throughout the building is reasonably comfortable throughout the school year.'

### Energy

In the last few years, new school construction has become much more energy efficient. The result of energy efficient school construction is that new schools typically pay less in combined utility costs per square foot, per year than older school buildings. The survey gathered information on the cost to charter schools of total utilities in their buildings. The median utility cost for Georgia charter schools is within the range of typical utility costs for all Georgia schools.

- The median utility (gas, propane, and/or electricity) cost for Georgia charter schools is \$1.37 per square foot. For a school with 39,500 square feet, which is the median size of Georgia charter schools, this equals an expenditure of \$54,115 per year.
- Twenty-five percent of Georgia charter schools pay more than \$1.70 per square foot. This equates to an annual cost of \$93,500 for a larger charter school with this per square foot utility cost.

### Specialized Instructional Spaces

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

- Twenty-five percent of Georgia charter schools do not have a dedicated library space. Of those that do, only eight percent meet Georgia square foot standards.
- Only 50 percent of Georgia charter schools that serve middle or high school students have a science lab. Of the limited labs available, only 17 percent are of adequate size.
- Twenty-two percent of Georgia charter schools do not have an art or music room. For those that do have one or both, more than three-quarters fall well below (by 20 percent or more) accepted size standards.

### Looking Ahead

Charter school facility challenges – paying more for facilities, a high percentage of which do not meet generally accepted standards – will continue or get worse without a comprehensive action program.

- More than 51 percent of Georgia charter schools are in facilities that are owned by another organization and for which they pay rent. These rent payments will go on forever without assistance to purchase or build a facility or gain access to a district school.
- Thirty percent of Georgia charter schools utilize modular classrooms, which have a much shorter useful life and require more maintenance than brick and mortar schools.
- Almost 92 percent of Georgia charter schools plan to increase their enrollment by 2015. Median projected growth is 32 percent of current enrollment. More than 55 percent of charter schools report that they do not have adequate space to serve their desired 2015 enrollment.
- While 25 percent of Georgia charter schools enjoy use of district facilities, often without paying rent, one-half of these facilities were built before 1970. Access to E-SPLOST and/or general obligation bond funds will be needed to either maintain the facilities in conditions suitable for students or renovate the facilities.
- One-quarter to more than one-half of Georgia charter schools report having maintenance issues that include leaky roofs, site drainage problems, inoperable windows, and inadequate water pressure. These issues are only going to get worse over time unless addressed.

## CONCLUSIONS

All Georgia public school students deserve to be in adequate facilities. However, the results from the 2010 Georgia Charter School Facilities Study clearly indicate that students attending Georgia start-up charters are not currently housed in adequate facilities. Better charter school facilities can become a reality in two ways—holding districts accountable for providing unused, or underutilized, facilities to charter schools and/or providing Georgia charter schools with sufficient funds to purchase quality facilities or renovate their current facility to standard. According to the GCSA, only one district has lived up to the HB-555 statutory requirement to provide charters with the use of unused district owned facilities thus far.

In addition, the facilities offered (by the one district) tend to be old and not up to current size standards—requiring additional funds to bring them up to health, safety, and educational building standards. Under current law, Georgia charter schools are responsible for securing funding for updating or renovating these old buildings. The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools is currently studying the condition of empty public school buildings in Atlanta. The results of this study will inform how many facilities are available, as well as how much it would cost to retrofit them for use. These results are expected to be available in May 2011.

While the state has tried to assist charter schools with facilities costs through access to the E-SPLOST referenda and the State Facilities Grant Program, the dividends from these programs have, thus far, been very limited. Funds provided via these sources may be used to make minor repairs but would not cover the purchase of a newer facility, or the retrofitting of an old one. As evidenced throughout this report, due to a lack of facilities support, the buildings that charter schools are able to rent or purchase tend to be small and out of date.

The standards used in this study (see Appendix B) reflect schools and classroom sizes that are needed to provide charter school students with the same opportunity as other Georgia public school students. This is not an issue of favoritism; it is an issue of equity. Georgia charter school students are public school students too. Families who choose to attend the public school that best fits their children's educational needs should not have to do so at the expense of opportunities for participating in athletics, art, music or other programs that provide students with a well-rounded education.

Despite the facilities challenges faced by Georgia's charter schools, these schools are in demand and performing well. According to the facilities survey, there are over 3,000 students on waiting lists to attend Georgia charter schools. In addition, charter schools in Georgia perform similarly to non-charter public schools in the state. For example performance results from the 2009-2010 academic years showed the following<sup>3</sup>:

- Eighty percent of charters, compared to 77 percent of non-charters, made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).
- Average charter school graduation rates were 80 percent, compared to a statewide average of 81 percent.
- Charter school pass rates on the Criterion Referenced Competency Tests were at, or slightly above (by 1-2 percent points), the state average in each of the four subject areas (math, English language arts, science and social studies).

Providing access to, and funding for, facilities for Georgia's charter schools would help to widen programming options offered by charter schools, help to increase the quality of the educational experience for students attending them, and increase the number of seats available to waiting students.

3 See [http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/pea\\_charter.aspx](http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/pea_charter.aspx) (annual reports are located on top right-hand side of webpage).

## APPENDIX A

### Methodology

A critical first step in this analysis of charter schools was to develop the best possible set of data and information about charter school facilities and their needs.

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

The original questionnaire, developed for Colorado, included more than 300 items. Some items required multiple responses meaning that, for each charter school, more than 1300 pieces of information might be provided, depending primarily on school size. The questionnaire addresses topics that include the following:

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

The League's survey was revised to address Georgia-specific issues through a collaborative effort of the Georgia Charter Schools Association, the Colorado League of Charter Schools, Mr. Hutton, and Dr. Eckerling. A draft questionnaire was then field tested with a small group of charter schools to ensure clarity and comprehensiveness of the items. Based on this, as well as on visits to a number of charter schools, further revisions to the questionnaire were made.

Georgia Charter Schools Association staff assisted schools with completing the questionnaires to ensure both timely and accurate responses. Submitted questionnaires were reviewed again for accuracy and completeness. Follow-up was performed with the schools as necessary.

While the completed questionnaires are the primary source of information for this study, information from the Georgia Department of Education was used to provide data on pupil membership, per-pupil funding and free and reduced price lunch eligibility. The Georgia Charter Schools Association also provided information about school location, and identified Georgia charter schools that are members of a charter network.

Overall, 80 percent of Georgia charter schools were included in the analyses described above. The response rate indicates that the data reported is representative of all Georgia charter schools.

## APPENDIX B

### School Facility Standards

This section provides information about the standards used in this report. Some standards come directly from the Georgia Department of Education, Facilities Services Unit documents, others were derived from published regional standards, new school construction guidelines, national best practices, and/or extrapolation from the Georgia standards. In some cases, Georgia standards are minimums and are routinely exceeded in actual practice. A prime example is cafeteria size. In this case, the standard used was developed to reflect real life implementation. (Georgia standards for a high school cafeteria require 3.8 square feet per student while five square feet is a more typical minimum size per student.) For gymnasiums, a standard was developed that is lower than the Georgia standard (9,000 square feet at the middle school level versus a standard of 16,000 square feet).

General classroom standards are shown in Table 1. Georgia did not have square feet per student standards based on the maximum number of students served in a classroom; as a result, published regional standards were used along with typical new construction guidelines and recommendations. For classrooms, square feet per student standards are preferred to overall size requirements because charter school class sizes are often lower than those in traditional schools. Adjustments were made for Montessori and Expeditionary Learning programs to reflect that larger classrooms are required to implement these educational programs.

<b>Table 1. General Classroom Standards</b>		
<b>School Level</b>	<b>GA Department of Education Standards</b>	<b>GA Facility Study Standards</b>
ECE/Pre-K		42 SQ FT/Student
K		42 SQ FT/Student
K-3	750 SQ FT	
Grades 1-6		35 SQ FT/Student
Grades 7-8		30 SQ FT/Student
Grades 4-8	660 SQ FT	
Grades 9-12	660 SQ FT	32 SQ FT/Student

Site size standards are shown in Table 2. The table shows that Georgia standards were used for elementary, middle and high schools. Georgia does not have site size standards for K-8, K-12, or 6-12 grade configurations. These standards were derived from the Georgia standards by taking the average base acreage, rounded, for the lowest and highest grade levels for which Georgia standards are available (e.g., for K-12 schools, the average of five and 20, rounded, is 13). These acreage requirements were then reviewed by our industry experts to ensure that site size would at least be minimally sufficient to address the programmatic needs for that grade configuration.

<b>Table 2. School Site Standards</b>		
<b>School Level</b>	<b>GA Department of Education Standards</b>	<b>GA Facility Study Standards</b>
Grades K-5	5 acres + ((1 * FTEs)/100)	5 acres + ((1 * FTEs)/100)
Grades K-8		9 acres + ((1 * FTEs)/100)
Grades K-12		13 acres + ((1 * FTEs)/100)
Grades 6-8	12 acres + ((1 * FTEs)/100)	12 acres + ((1 * FTEs)/100)
Grades 6-12		16 acres + ((1 * FTEs)/100)
Grades 9-12	20 acres + ((1 * FTEs)/100)	20 acres + ((1 * FTEs)/100)

Georgia standards were used for total facility size, except for schools offering grades K-12 for which no Georgia standards are available. These standards are shown in Table 3 for schools enrolling 525 students. Georgia adjusts size standards based on larger and smaller enrollment levels. A K-12 standard was developed from regional standards and typical new construction guidelines for a school of 525 students. Adjustments were made to this standard for larger or smaller enrollment using the Georgia adjustment factors that were applied to other grade configurations.

<b>Table 3. Total School Facility Standards for 525 Students</b>		
<b>School Level</b>	<b>GA Department of Education Standards</b>	<b>GA Facility Study Standards</b>
Grades K-5	120 SQ FT/Student	120 SQ FT/Student
Grades K-8	113 SQ FT/Student	113 SQ FT/Student
Grades K-12		125 SQ FT/Student
Grades 6-8	150 SQ FT/Student	150 SQ FT/Student
Grades 6-12	137 SQ FT/Student	137 SQ FT/Student
Grades 9-12	163 SQ FT/Student	163 SQ FT/Student

Standards were also developed for specialized instructional spaces like libraries, computer rooms, science labs, art rooms, music rooms, special education classrooms, gymnasiums, lunch rooms, auditoriums, and health clinics. These standards, like those shown in the tables above, were derived from Georgia standards, published regional standards, and typical new construction guidelines and recommendations.

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