

All Rhode Island public schools should receive fair funding to support safe public schools. Unfortunately, Rhode Island's charter public schools do not have equitable access to facilities resources.

Challenges in Securing Funding for Facilities

Unlike district public schools, charter public schools cannot raise funding to build new schools through municipal bonds. As a result, **charter public schools are more reliant on renting and buying pre-existing spaces and are forced to rely on private mortgages, leases, or capital campaigns for major capital improvements, resulting in higher interest rates.**

Barriers to Leveraging Housing Aid

Like district public schools, charter public schools are technically eligible for State aid for school construction through the Housing Aid program. However, charter public schools face unique challenges in leveraging these funds:

- **Ownership Requirement.** To qualify for Housing Aid, a charter public school must own its facility. Finding, financing, renovating, and upgrading a building is a significant challenge.
- **Reimbursement Rates.** State aid for district public schools is calculated based on a wealth ratio, providing more funding to less wealthy communities, with reimbursement rates ranging from 35% to 95%. **In contrast, charter public schools receive a fixed rate of 30%, regardless of the needs of the students or communities they serve.**

Inequitable Per Pupil Funding

Education funding is intended to support all public school students, *regardless of the type of public school they attend*; yet charter public schools often receive significantly less funding per pupil than their district peers.

Districts can retain a portion of funding for overhead and facility costs, meaning **charter public schools frequently end up with a substantial gap in per-student funding, averaging \$4,350 less per student than state average.** This disparity forces charter public schools to dip into their operating budgets in order to try to maintain safe, well-equipped buildings, which negatively impacts all aspects of charter public school budgets, including salaries.

Lack of Fair Access to School-Ready Facilities

Charter public schools often help revitalize neighborhoods by turning vacant buildings into vibrant schools and community spaces. In doing so, **school leaders face challenges like high retrofit costs, acoustical problems, and the need for extensive building system upgrades, all without access to fair funding.**

Additional Red Tape

Charter public schools face significant regulatory and bureaucratic hurdles:

- **Zoning and land-use rules** complicate the repurposing of non-traditional spaces, while local political opposition can block access to publicly owned buildings. Limited state capital funds and procurement rules for city-owned properties often require charter public schools to raise private funds or navigate complex contracting processes.
- **Leasing arrangements** legally restrict charter public schools from accessing state financial assistance.
- **Building repairs and maintenance** are costly. Of the 55% of charter public schools that own their buildings, many struggle to maintain them because state support is limited. As a result, schools have to spend money on repairs instead of on staff or student needs.

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Without equitable access to facilities resources for all public school students, Rhode Island maintains a two tier public education system that leaves some public schools behind.

Charter public school students and teachers deserve fair access to facilities resources.