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Comptroller Releases Report on Charter School Facilities

The Comptroller's Offices of Research and Education Accountability (OREA) has released a report that examines the way charter school facilities are funded in Tennessee. The report provides information on the facilities arrangements for Tennessee's charter schools and describes efforts in Tennessee and other states to provide charter schools with facilities-related assistance.

Charter schools are public schools operated by independent governing bodies and are authorized by one of the following three entities in Tennessee: local boards of education, the Achievement School District (ASD), or the State Board of Education (SBOE). The majority of charters in Tennessee are authorized by local boards of education. As of the 2015-16 school year, 97 public charter schools operate in Tennessee. These school are located in Hamilton County (3), Knox County (1), Metro Nashville (27), Shelby County (45), and the Achievement School District (21).

Charter schools authorized by school districts and the State Board of Education must secure their own facility arrangements. Once a charter school's application is approved, it is the responsibility of the school operator to secure its own school facility; neither the local board of education nor the SBOE is required to provide a facility to the charter schools they authorize. ASD charter schools neither lease nor own their school facilities and are not responsible for securing a school facility. Almost all charter schools in the ASD are instead located in a school facility previously operated by a local school district and subsequently taken over by the ASD because of low academic performance.

Unlike traditional schools, which are the property of the local board of education, most charter schools either lease, own, or have financed to own their school facility. The majority of Tennessee's charter schools lease their facilities, either from private property owners (50 percent), their authorizing school district (22 percent), or public entities such as a city or county government (9 percent). The remaining schools own or have financed to own their buildings.

Nationally, programs to provide charter schools with facilities-related assistance typically fall into four general categories:

- Access to district facilities,
- Assistance with borrowing money,
- Dedicated per-pupil funding, and
- Competitive state grants

OREA is a division within the Comptroller's Office that is charged with providing accurate and objective policy research and analysis for the Tennessee General Assembly and the public.

To view the full report online, go to: <http://www.comptroller.tn.gov/OREA/>

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