

TENNESSEE CHARTER SCHOOL FACILITIES SURVEY RESULTS



Facilities and facilities funding, in particular, are a persistent challenge for charter schools across the country. Charter schools in Tennessee are no exception. Charter schools must locate available facilities; identify funding for lease, purchase, or even construction; identify additional funding for necessary renovations to make a facility safe and accessible for students; and often do all of this before their application to operate has been approved, which can make finding resources additionally challenging.



This brief summarizes the results of this survey and concludes with a summary of implications for state and local leaders as well as those advocating for a high-quality charter sector in Tennessee.

The Tennessee Charter School Center (TCSC) has advocated on behalf of charters to help ensure that all students have access to a safe and high-quality learning environment. Recent successes in facilities funding equity include:

- \$20 million in the State budget for charter school facilities to be distributed to each charter school on a per-pupil basis (the final budget language provides that the full \$20 million will be distributed per-pupil)
- \$5 million in the State budget for the creation of a Tennessee Equitable Facilities Fund to provide a revolving loan financing option for charter schools
- An update to State code providing charter schools the right of first refusal to purchase at or below fair market value vacant or underutilized LEA property as defined through rule by the State Board of Education.

Because student outcomes like academic achievement, graduation rates, and attendance often dominate conversations about school quality, it can be easy to overlook a simple fact: where students learn matters. If students don't have access to high-quality learning environments, the outcomes most of us focus on will suffer.

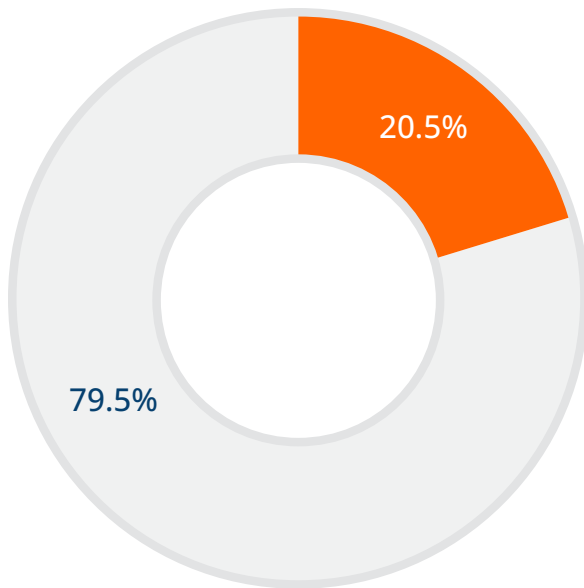
To better inform our work, we at TCSC conducted a survey¹ of all Tennessee charter schools with the goal of answering the following questions:

- 1 What is the status of the sector in terms of property ownership/leasing arrangements?
- 2 How much are schools spending on renovations/building upkeep?
- 3 What are the biggest facilities-related challenges facing charter schools in Tennessee?

¹ In total, we surveyed all 125 charter schools that have been authorized to operate in Tennessee (including those opening in 2025-2026) and received responses from 67 (53%). The survey was administered via email in May of 2025 with follow up calls to schools to help improve response rates. Although our responses do not include all schools in the state, they represent the experiences of a significant number of charter school leaders in the state. In total, 34% of our schools represent single-site schools with 66% representing a network. 8.5% are authorized by Hamilton County, 46.3 % by Memphis-Shelby County Schools, 25.4% by Metro Nashville Public Schools, 1.5% by Rutherford County Schools, and 19.4% by the Tennessee Charter School Commission. Additionally, six respondents were from schools that will open in 2025-2026.

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Does your school share a facility with another school?



DOES SCHOOL SHARE A FACILITY? (CMO SCHOOLS, ONLY)

Charter Management Organization (CMO) is a non-profit entity that manages and operates more than one public charter school. Among CMO-affiliated schools, 20.5% of schools shared a facility with another school. This suggests that roughly a fifth of schools are finding efficiencies as they look at expansion and replication.

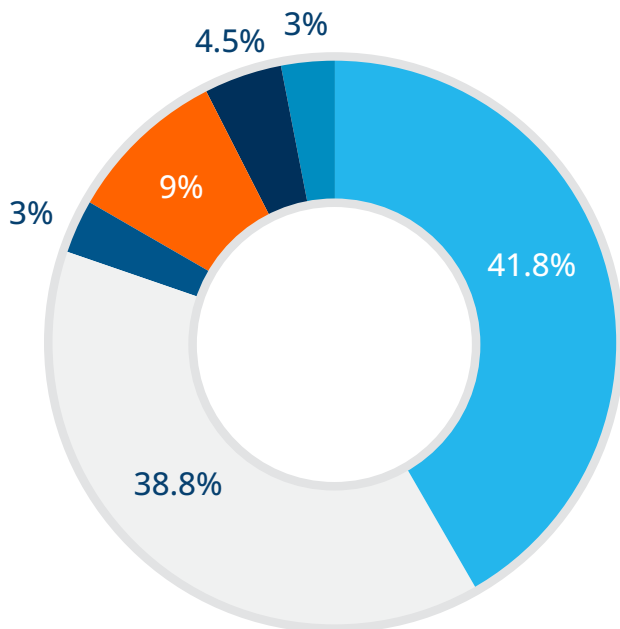
SHARING STATUS:

- No, this school does not share a facility.
- Yes, it shares a facility with another school in our network.

Total N = 44

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What is the current ownership or leasing arrangement for this school's facility?



Total N = 67

OWNERSHIP OR LEASING ARRANGEMENT

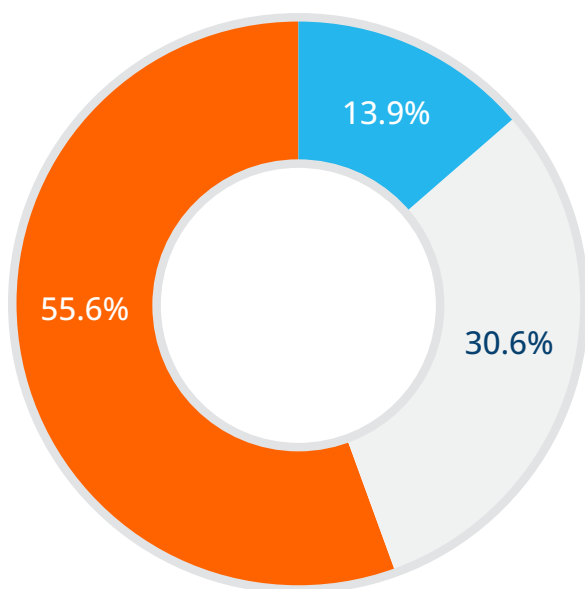
Just under half of charter schools (41.8%) own their building while a similar percentage (38.8%) lease from a private landlord. This highlights the fact that the vast majority of charter schools rely on resources outside of their authorizing district for their facility needs.

ARRANGEMENT:

- Owned by the school/ charter organization
- Leased from a private landlord
- Leased from a non-school district governmental agency
- Leased from a local education agency (LEA)
- In process of purchasing
- Both own and lease

3

For schools that lease their buildings, does this school hope to purchase the building from the entity currently leasing it to them?



Total N = 36

HOPE TO PURCHASE LEASED FACILITY (LEASED FACILITIES ONLY)

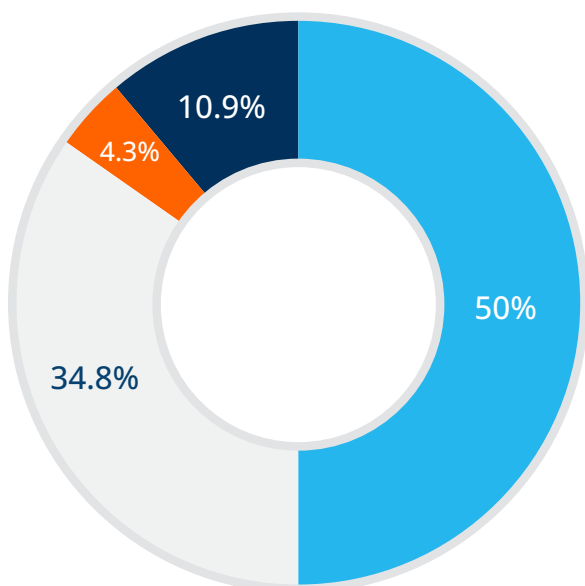
Just 14% of schools that lease their current facilities hope to one day own the building. This suggests that schools in leasing agreements likely favor the flexibility that a lease provides and/or consider the space adequate for short-term use but insufficient for long-term investment. This is especially true as schools look to increase enrollment or expand their offerings, potentially outgrowing their current facilities. However, of the 5 schools that said they intended to purchase their leased building, 3 said that they were in the process of purchasing. While this sample is too small to make conclusions about the entire sector, this seems to suggest that purchasing a leased building is a possibility for many schools that wish to do so.

PURCHASE INTENT:



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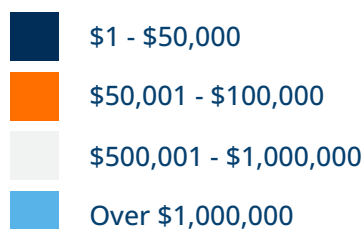
To the best of your knowledge, how much has this school spent on building renovations in the last 5 years (since March 2020)?



RENOVATION SPENDING (SINCE MARCH 2020)

Among respondents who knew the amount spent on renovations in the last five years (approximately one third reported not knowing this information), exactly half said they had spent over \$1,000,000 with another third saying they had spent between \$500,000-\$1,000,000.

RENOVATION SPENDING:



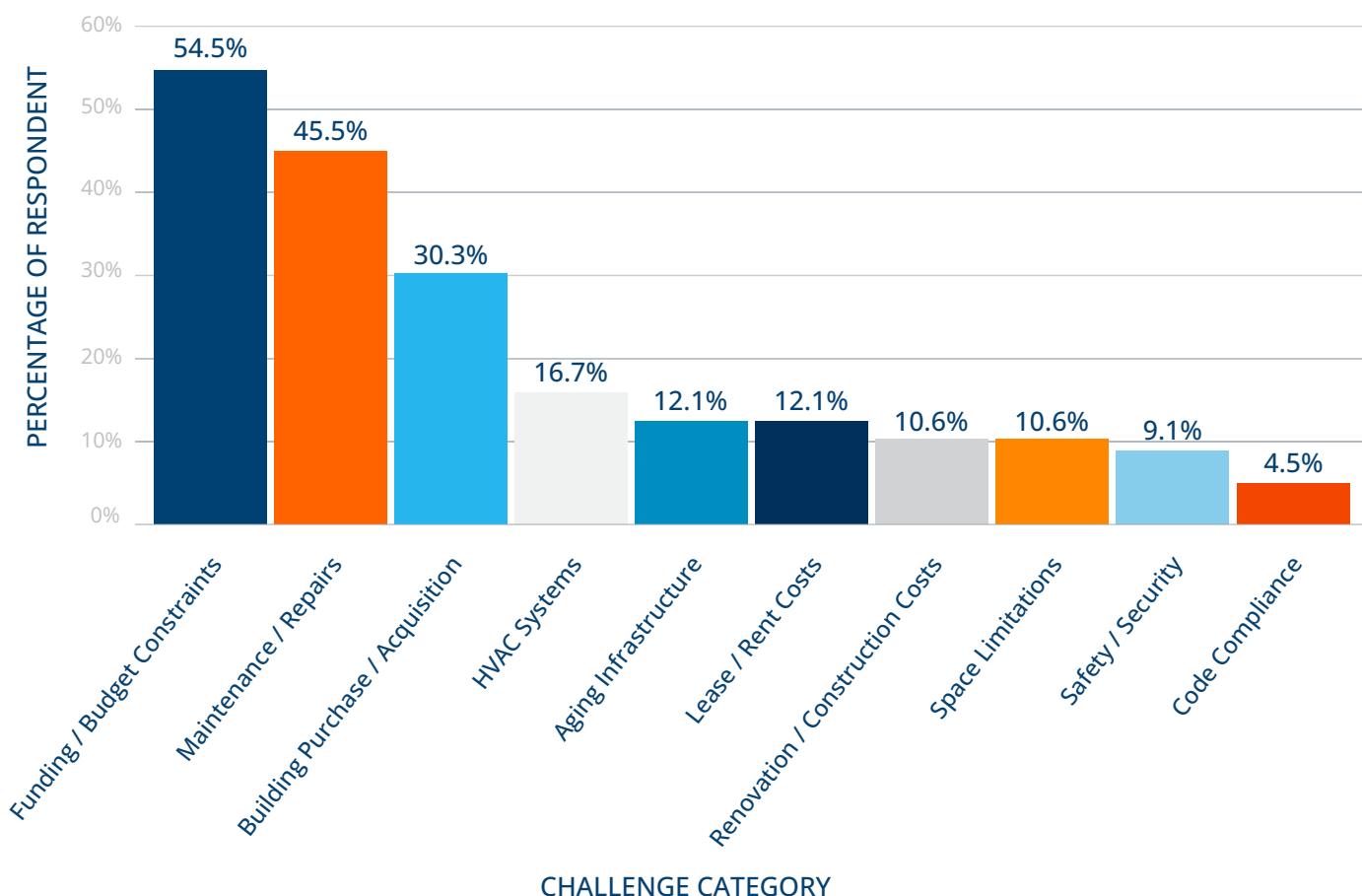
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What are the biggest facilities-related challenges your school(s) are facing?

Given the renovation/maintenance costs described above, it is no surprise that just over half of respondents said that funding/budget constraints are a top issue faced by their school. Related, just under half (45.5%) of respondents listed maintenance and repairs as a challenge. Finally, one-third of respondents said that purchasing a facility was a serious challenge.

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS REPORTING FACILITY CHALLENGES

Note: Percentages sum > 100% due to multiple responses per respondent | N = 66 respondents



The survey results reveal key insights into charter school facilities:

OPERATIONAL FLEXIBILITY:

Charter schools, by operating outside of traditional district constraints, adapt to community needs by sharing buildings for efficiency or leasing properties allowing them flexibility as they grow.

BUILDING ACQUISITION:

It appears that many schools who wish to purchase a leased facility are able to do so. However, barriers still remain for roughly a third of respondents in our sample.

COST CHALLENGES:

The cost to acquire and maintain facilities is substantial and was reported as a top issue by over half of respondents.

Although we saw several successes during this most recent legislative session, more work remains as we advocate for equitable facilities funding. We will continue to advocate for resources and policies to address these ongoing challenges, ensuring charter schools have the support needed for high-quality facilities.

