



2019

Position Statement on School Facilities



AAEA supports additional funding for the Facilities Partnership Program. It is essential that this depleted funding source be replenished with either a secure ongoing appropriation or a one-time allocation from general improvement funds.

The Facilities Partnership Program must be adequately funded. Act 1426 of 2005, the Arkansas Public School Academic Facilities Program Act, has the following language, "in order to satisfy the constitutional expectations of the Supreme Court, the state should: (1) provide constitutionally appropriate public school academic facilities for the education of each similarly situated child in the public schools of AR, regardless of where that child resides within the state.

In collaboration, local school districts and the state have invested approximately \$2.5 billion to upgrade academic facilities since the inception (2006-2007) of the Partnership Program through 2016-2017 (\$1.62 billion locally and \$920 million from the state). Investing in school facilities not only meets the needs of students but also is a tremendous economic investment that creates jobs and supports Arkansas construction trades. However, there are still facility needs to be met in the state. The one-time general improvement allocation has been spent down and a general revenue investment of less than \$35 million is woefully inadequate to meet the current and future school facility needs.

In addition, a comparative study of the state's school district facilities is needed to assess equity between districts and establish priorities for funding decisions. A statewide assessment of school facilities has not been conducted since the original study over 10 years ago.

Current legislation indicates that open-enrollment charters are public schools. As public schools, the issue of adequate facilities applies to them also. AAEA continues to recommend that charter schools should be able to access facility partnership funding rather than the current method of a separate funding stream for charter school facilities. These "charter facility funds" are not restricted to academic facilities and are not subject to the same oversight and review that traditional public school facility expenditures are under. The statewide assessment of school facilities referenced above should include charter facilities also.

ALL public schools, traditional and charter, that make requests for partnership funding, should follow the same procedures and guidelines to ensure that projects are funded according to the greatest needs.

Talking Points:

- Investing in school facilities meets the needs of students and schools and is an economic investment that creates jobs and supports Arkansas construction trades.
- Critical facility needs still exist in certain parts of the state and need to be addressed in order to provide an adequate learning environment for ALL students.
- The portion of the state budget that goes to public education is steadily declining, from 49% in 2002-2003 to 42% in 2016-2017. Maintaining a stable level of support from general state revenue providing for facility funding and teacher salaries would be a HUGE economic boost to the state.
- All funding for school facilities should flow through the Partnership program. ALL public schools, traditional and charter should follow the same procedures and guidelines to ensure that projects are funded according to the greatest needs.
- An updated study of the state's school facilities, both district and charter, is needed to assess equity and establish priorities for funding decisions. A statewide assessment of traditional public school facilities has not been conducted since the original study over 10 years ago and an assessment of charter school facilities has never been done.