

# **LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF OKLAHOMA EDUCATION POSITION RESTUDY: OKLAHOMA EDUCATION AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Despite (or maybe because of) the fact that education has always been considered important in the United States, it seems to be constantly changing. The world of education has definitely changed since the League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) last conducted a complete study of the issue in 1973. (Note: limited studies and positions were undertaken on textbook selection in 1986, corporal punishment in 1989, and education curriculum in 2005).

One of the biggest changes since the mid/late 1970s has been in the area of technology. The idea that students would have ready access to computers, smart phones and other electronic devices would never have occurred to a generation that had just gotten accustomed to color television. Another area of major concern has been with the privatization of education and with the lack of proper funding for education at all levels.

We wish to acknowledge the assistance of the following individuals who have helped us with this work:

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The LWVOK Education Restudy Task Force has investigated public schools and the way they are funded. It has also researched higher education, vouchers, charter and virtual schools. In the interest of “readability,” some results of their research have been included in appendices. The materials also include a glossary of terms and a list of supplemental readings. Because the face of education changes daily, all League members are encouraged to contribute current information in addition to what is presented here.

These materials are divided into five parts

- I. Financing of common schools
- II. Vouchers
- III. Charter schools
- IV. Virtual classes and schools
- V. Post-secondary education

The sections need not be studied in the order given above. Each League can decide how to approach these materials. More than a single meeting will probably be necessary in order to cover all the information provided. Before considering the information on these five topics, it is important to outline what the LWVUS and the LWVOK have stated in their positions on education.

The LWVUS believes that

- the primary responsibility for education rests with the states,
- an equitable, quality public education is critical for students,
- the federal government should be primarily responsible for funding programs mandated by the federal government,
- a basic role of the federal government in funding education is to achieve equity among states and populations on the basis of identified needs.

The LWVUS believes that the federal government is responsible for

- providing a series of general standards which the states and local districts can adapt,
- creating national assessments that permit individuals and schools to evaluate their performance,
- giving money to states and local districts through both competitive and non-competitive grants to address inequities.

The LWVOK believes that quality education for all children in Oklahoma depends on adequate financing and supports

- the state assuming the major responsibility for financing common schools,
- the state assuming responsibility for equalizing financial resources among school districts,
- the major portion of financing common schools move away from a base of ad valorem taxes,
- continued improvement of assessment practices,
- the removal of constitutional limitation on millage,
- broad based sources such as income and sales tax used to provide funds,
- removal of loopholes in tax laws including the exemptions from property taxes,
- the requirement that each school district vote the maximum millage,
- consideration of formulas other than Average Daily Attendance (ADA) for state aid.

The LWVOK believes that all schools should deliver a basic curriculum that prepares all students for the future. This curriculum should include language arts, mathematics, social studies, history and world languages. The basic curriculum should be specific enough to ensure that all students have a grounding in the subject matter, but flexible enough to allow for individual students to choose additional courses that address their needs, interests and career goals.

The LWVOK supports mandatory kindergarten for all children by the state. It also supports special education including services for gifted children.

The LWVOK believes that improved financing, accountability of expenditures, and more efficient financial procedures are the keys to providing quality higher education in Oklahoma. It believes that the state government should assume the major responsibility for financing state institutions of higher learning.

The LWVOK believes that the boards of higher education should be restructured to provide better governance of the system. The coordinating board, the State Board of Regents for Higher Education, should remain a constitutional board.

The LWVOK believes that vocational-technical education should play a larger role in the story of total education. Counseling in career education needs emphasis, and greater opportunities for youth and adults in vocational-technical education need to be provided.

The writing team that prepared these study materials consisted of four LWVOK members: Sheila Swearingen (Tulsa), Judy Reynolds (Norman), Jan Largent (Stillwater), and Karen Cárdenas (Tulsa).

## EDUCATION FINANCE

### Current Common Education Funding in Oklahoma

The Oklahoma legislature appropriates more funds to common education than to any other state function: 35.8% of state appropriations in 2017 ([“8 key facts,” 2017](#)). Nevertheless, state public schools are underfunded. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), a nonpartisan American research institute, combined state and local school funding per pupil in Oklahoma declined 11.8% (adjusted for inflation) between 2008 and 2015. The CBPP lists several causes for this decline in financial support for Oklahoma students including weak revenues, rising costs of education, and state policy choices ([Leachman, 2017](#)). During this period, falling oil prices and slow sales tax growth contributed to the problem of weak revenues in Oklahoma. The increase in untaxed internet sales contributes to weak revenue collection as well. After the recession, because property values fell, property tax collections also declined. At the same time, statewide enrollment has increased by 30,000 pupils since 2009 ([Burkett, n.d.](#)). The increase in the number of students during this time and the decrease in federal aid to education also led to the rising costs of educating Oklahoma students.

State policy choices that significantly impacted education funding in these years included cutting budgets to close general budget shortfalls rather than finding more sources of revenue and cutting both personal and corporate income tax rates. Other policy changes are a 2012 ballot initiative, SQ 766 that exempted intangible property from tax liability. In that same year, SQ 758, another ballot initiative, capped the yearly property tax valuation increase at 3%. Before 2012, the cap was 5%. In 2014, SB 1469 extended the moratorium on accreditation standards for class size, textbook and library media spending. Also in 2014, HB 1378 required student CPR training without providing any additional funding. Finally, the Gross Production Tax (GPT) has been reduced from 7% to 2% for the first 3 years of a well's production increasing to 7% for the remainder of the well's years of production. Another policy shift by the legislature that has been noted is funding line items and specific reforms rather than general school operations, which usually make up the largest part of a district's budget ([Burkett, n.d.](#)).

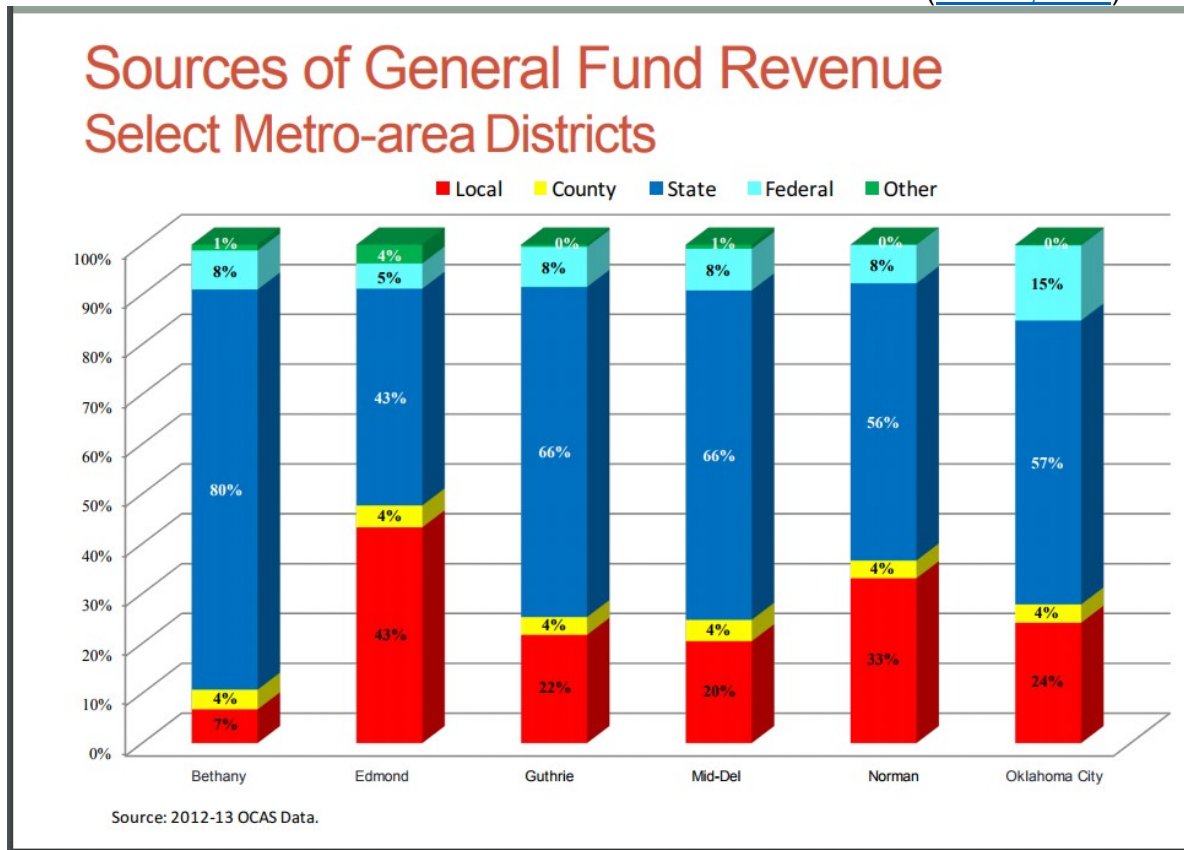
These policy choices are of great interest to the LWVOK in this study. Insufficient funds for our state public schools leads to inadequately preparing Oklahoma youth for productive and fulfilling employment, declining teacher quality, increased class sizes, less learning time in classrooms, and fewer options for high-quality early education. Some collateral effects of underfunding schools are diminished economic growth because of layoffs and reduced purchasing of textbooks, supplies, and contracts for school projects, the need for more university-level remedial classes, and the inability of the state to attract new business and industry requiring a well-educated workforce.

The LWVOK is engaging in a restudy of education finance in order to find positions to advocate for improved and adequate funding for common education in Oklahoma. To begin, it's important to understand how the state currently funds common education.

### Sources of Common Education Funding in Oklahoma

School districts in Oklahoma get revenue from state, local--including county, and federal sources ([Oklahoma State Department of Education \[OSDE\], Feb. 2017](#)). See Chart 1. School revenues, except for ad valorem, are controlled by Average Daily Attendance (ADA) or Average Daily Membership (ADM).

Chart 1 Sources of General Fund Revenue Select Metro-area Districts ([Burkett, 2015](#))



School districts get the majority of their funds from the state. (See Chart 2 Sources of Revenue General Fund). The state revenue comes from dedicated and line items funds and from appropriations by the Legislature. (See [Oklahoma School Finance Technical Assistance Document, p.11](#) for a complete listing of the Oklahoma State Department of Education Common Education FY 2018 Appropriations)

The state-dedicated revenue sources are:

- Gross Production Tax (GPT), (Calculated on ADA percentage within the county)
  - Motor Vehicle Collections, (Calculated on ADA across Oklahoma)
  - Rural Electrification Association Tax (REA) (based on miles of lines)
  - State School Land Earnings (Calculated on ADA percentage across Oklahoma)
  - Foundation and Salary Incentive Aid (Calculated on WADM)
- (Evans, Andy, personal communication, April 4, 2018)

The Foundation and Salary Incentive Aid revenue is the primary funding source for Oklahoma school districts. In 2016, 7.14% of revenue from the GPT was allocated for school districts. Any growth in revenues from these dedicated state sources are considered “chargeables” against the district budgets each year when calculating their share from the state funding formula.

State line items are funds for textbooks, employee health coverage, and other specific programs and reforms like those listed below:

- ACE Technology (Achieving Classroom Excellence Act of 2005)
- Alternative and High Challenge Education
- Driver Education
- Flexible Benefit Allowance—Certified/Support
- Reading Sufficiency Act (RSA)
- School Consolidation Assistance Fund
- School Lunch—State Matching
- National Board Certified Bonus.

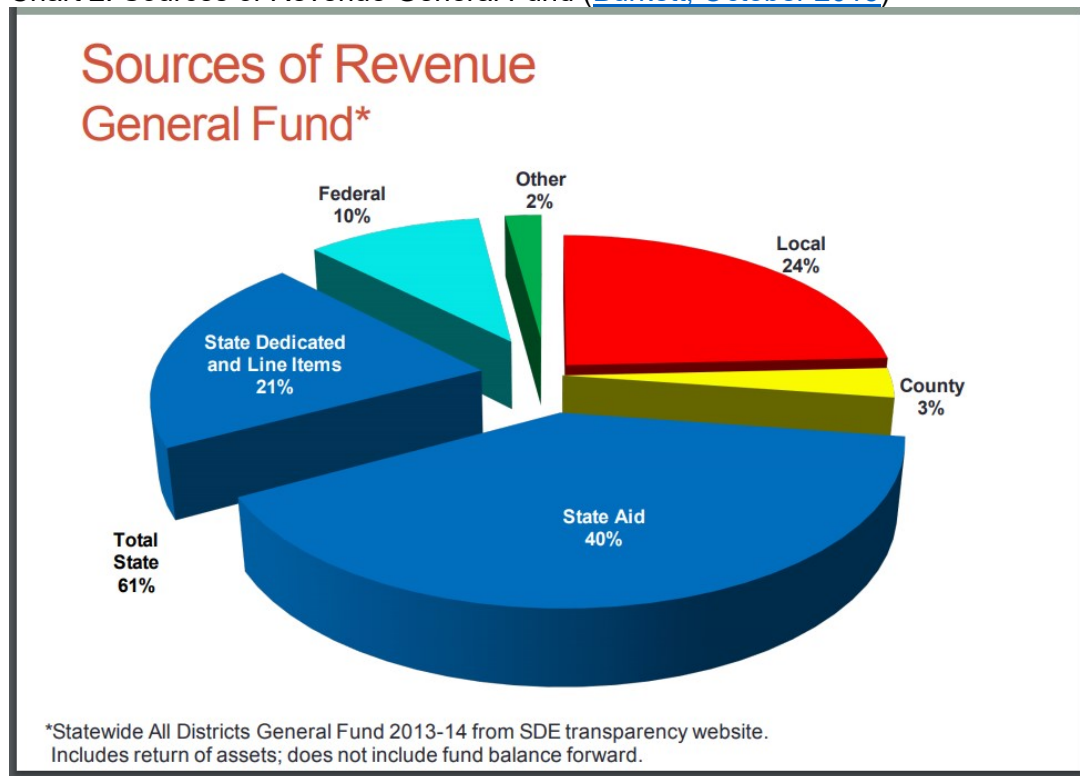
State Aid funds come from the State General Revenue fund, the Education Revolving Fund (1017 Fund), the Common Education Technology Fund, the Oklahoma Lottery Trust Fund, the Mineral Leasing Fund, the School Consolidation Assistance Fund, and from the Rainy Day fund. State Aid is dispersed to districts through the state aid formula ([OSDE, Oct. 2017, p.21-53](#)) that is administered by the Oklahoma State Board of Education (OSBE).

The state aid formula is a complicated formula that uses weighted average daily membership (WADM) to calculate a district's share of state funds. The object of the formula is to equalize funding across state school districts, although it doesn't fully accomplish that goal ([Burkett, October 2015](#)). It has been reported that "... many education experts consider Oklahoma's funding formula among the country's most equitable ... " ([Wendler, 2017](#)). Emily Wendler reported for State Impact that "37 districts don't receive any funding from the state". This is because their counties bring in so much ad valorem money from a wind farm business, a gas plant, or the Google data center, for example. One proposal is to share the local wealth from districts like these with less fortunate districts through changes to the state aid formula ([2017](#)).

An OSBE Legislative Update from State Superintendent Joy Hofmeister reported that in July 2017, HB1578 established the Task Force on Improving the State Aid Formula. This 16-member group is authorized to make recommendations to the legislature through December 2018 when their report is due. The appointees on this task force will "study the State Aid funding formula, local ad valorem rates, formula structure, and efficiencies and cost-saving measures of school districts." HB1578 also created the School Finance Review Commission which "...will conduct a review of all matters related to school finance, including but not limited to teacher compensation, benefits and administration costs and submit a report by December 31, 2023 and every four years thereafter" ([Hofmeister, 2017](#)).

For a comprehensive look at the state aid formula definitions of terms and calculations see: [Oklahoma State Department of Education Technical Assistance Document \(OSDE 2017, October\)](#)

Chart 2. Sources of Revenue General Fund ([Burkett, October 2015](#))



The state lottery has contributed to school funding in Oklahoma. The Oklahoma Education Lottery and Lottery Trust Fund were created in 2004. At least 35% of the net proceeds from the lottery are to be appropriated by

the legislature for several education agencies. These funds are usually used for general operating expenses rather than for any dedicated purpose. Lottery funds are to supplement not supplant other education funding.

The contribution of the lottery to the Oklahoma Education Lottery Trust Fund has been steady since 2006 at about \$70 million per year, though it has started to decline recently due to greater competition from tribal gaming. The contribution of the lottery and tribal gaming are barely half of what K-12 education has lost due to cuts to the state's top income tax rate, according to analysis by Oklahoma Policy Institute. (["8 key facts" 2017](#))

In addition to school districts across the state, charter schools also receive state education funds. An important impediment to the development of charter schools is the low level of state funding for all public schools. (See Charter Schools section of this document for details about funding charter schools.)

In 2016, State Question 779 was promoted by Oklahoma's Children, Our Future, a group spearheaded by David Boren--President of OU, to provide funds for education. The question, which was put on the ballot by petition, called for a 1% state sales tax to create more revenue for education in Oklahoma. Common schools were to receive 69.5% of the funds generated, institutions governed by the Oklahoma State Regents of Higher Education 19.25%, the Department of Career and Technology Education 3.25%, and the State Department of Education 8%. The question was defeated by voters 59% to 41%.

In the spring of 2018 while this study was being prepared, Oklahoma teachers planned to walk out of their classrooms and go to the capitol to persuade the legislature to find recurring revenue sources for education. Just before the walkout was to begin, the legislature approved funding for the coming school year amounting to about half a billion dollars. The revenue came from increasing the gross production tax to 5%, increasing gasoline and diesel taxes, a sales tax on third-party internet sales, and increasing the tax on cigarettes. Ball and dice gambling was also approved and will generate tax revenue, but those proceeds will not be available until 2019. An increase in the Hotel/Motel tax was also approved but later eliminated from the revenue plan. These funds will provide average teacher salary increases of \$6,100, and increased pay for support staff and public employees.

Despite these measures, the historic teacher walkout began April 2 and lasted 9 days for many districts across the state. Teachers were supported by public employees, parents, students, and administrators as they pressed for a stronger commitment to providing recurring revenue for education. The teachers proposed repealing a capital gains tax exemption that would have yielded more funds, but the legislature refused to approve it. No further funding measures were passed during and after the walkout. As local LWV groups discuss this education study, these issues will still be in flux. As a result of the walkout, a group called Oklahoma Taxpayers Unite was organizing to circulate a petition calling for a statewide ballot initiative to repeal the revenue package supporting teachers' demands. These actions this year underscore the importance of being informed about how and if our state provides adequate funding for education at all levels.

## **Local Sources of Oklahoma School District Funds**

Local sources of revenue are seven different ad valorem tax levies that are defined and limited by the state constitution. Ad valorem tax is the local property tax that is levied in mills (1 mill = 1/1000 of a dollar). Ad valorem revenue is generally used as a local source of school funding in the U.S. This tax is limited by the Oklahoma Constitution to 35% of the fair cash value of real, personal, and public service property. Ad valorem revenue is determined by the adjusted valuation in the district (Evans, Andy, personal communication, April 3, 2018)



## Ad Valorem Tax Levies for School Purposes

### General Fund:

Certification of Need	15 mills
County 4-mill levy	4 mills (calculated on WADA in the county)
County 15-mill levy	5 mills
Emergency levy	5 mills
Local Support levy	10 mills

Building Fund: 5 mills

Sinking Fund: depends on bond issue election

The definitions of these levies can be found in this state department of education document ([OSDE, 2017, October, pp. 1-6](#)).

The General Fund levies are “not really optional” and “in effect, there is no constitutionally permissible way for districts, even by approval of voters, to raise additional ad valorem levies to support the general operation of the schools” ([OSDE, 2017, October p.2](#)). For a complete list of the constitutional ad valorem levies for schools, county government, municipal government, and special districts, see Oklahoma School Finance Technical Assistance Document ([OSDE, 2017, October p. 6](#)).

School districts can secure funds from bonds, but this funding can only be used for “improving or acquiring school sites, constructing, repairing, remodeling and equipping school buildings, and acquiring school furniture, fixtures, equipment, uniforms, technology, and transportation equipment.” ([Smith](#)). Therefore, bond money cannot be used for salaries or benefits. Bond issues must be approved by 60% of the voters in a district bond election. These bonds are repaid from the district Sinking Fund which accumulates revenue from ad valorem taxes.

School districts develop their budgets without knowing exactly what their resources will be each year. Their budgets are based on revenue collections in prior years and adjustments are made mid-year for changes in collections, ADA, and ADM. Districts maintain fund balances, or carryover funds, to help compensate for these unknown factors.

Several common arguments about Oklahoma school funding have been addressed by David Blatt of the Oklahoma Policy Institute:

The first myth is that education revenue is at an all-time high. PolitiFact analyzed this claim and found it to be “mostly false,” concluding that when “population and economic growth are added in, spending has been higher over most of the past decade.” OK Policy finds that, adjusted for inflation, per-pupil revenue from all local, state, and federal sources combined is down 12 percent compared with the pre-recession peak in 2009.

The second, more long-standing myth is that if Oklahoma could only reduce the amount it spends supporting so many school districts, we’d have more than enough to pay our teachers properly. The numbers prove otherwise.

School district administration accounted for \$237 per student in 2015, about 3 percent of total school spending. This ranks us right in the middle of the U.S. Meanwhile, our rank for per pupil spending on instruction is near the lowest – 47th. If the state somehow moved every dollar that we spend on district administration into instruction, our ranking would... still be 47th. We wouldn’t move the needle a single spot. ([2018](#))

## Federal Sources of Oklahoma School District Funds

The federal government funds several programs, the largest of which are from the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Title I for disadvantaged students, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). These funds have been subject to sequestration, a federal budget mechanism by which federal programs are cut 5% each year for 10 years.

Something to note is that the 5% federal level cut is allocated through a formula to the 50 states which in turn is allocated in Oklahoma through another formula to the approximately 540 school districts. The complex allocation formulas produce a different rate of budget cuts in each district ([Burkett, n.d.](#)). Funding cuts of varying percentages due to federal sequestration measures are likely to continue through 2023.

Because of the recession in 2008-9, the federal government provided some stimulus money to Oklahoma. The state received the last of those funds in 2011-12.

A great deal of interest in school finance and school privatization has been generated recently. A related trend is providing new schooling options for families. Some families receive vouchers from their school districts to be used in private schools. Some children attend public charter schools that are designed to encourage innovation and competition. Virtual schools that use technology rather than brick and mortar classrooms to deliver content are also proliferating in our state and country. These developments and trends are not without controversy. Studies are being done to measure the effectiveness of these options, but so far, the results indicate that more study is necessary. Citizens need to consider the changing roles of parents, educators, government, private enterprise, and students in determining, improving, and delivering curriculum as well as in funding and governing schools.

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### **Additional Reading**

Not Going to be Enough for our Circumstances: School Finances have Changed Little Despite Walk-Out [http://www.tulsaworld.com/news/education/not-going-to-be-enough-for-our-circumstances-school-finances/article\\_6acf92df-4102-5bfa-ac82-50aee7152dcf.html](http://www.tulsaworld.com/news/education/not-going-to-be-enough-for-our-circumstances-school-finances/article_6acf92df-4102-5bfa-ac82-50aee7152dcf.html)

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Oklahoma School Finance Technical Assistance Document-- this document contains the State Aid Formula and many definitions of terms including ad valorem tax levies  
[http://sde.ok.gov/sde/sites/ok.gov.sde/files/documents/files/FY%202018%20TAD%20toc%20updated%20mp\\_r\\_m\\_1.pdf](http://sde.ok.gov/sde/sites/ok.gov.sde/files/documents/files/FY%202018%20TAD%20toc%20updated%20mp_r_m_1.pdf)

School Finance 101—a powerpoint presentation by Brenda Burkett, CFO of Norman Public Schools. (2015, October) This is a good overview of common school funding.  
<https://www.normanpublicschools.org/cms/lib/OK02210265/Centricity/Domain/48/School%20Finance%20101.pdf>

School Revenue—The Simplified Version. [A powerpoint presentation from OPSRC](#). (Available on the LWVOK website: [lwwok.org](http://lwwok.org))

Twenty Questions (and Answers) about School Finance. Edmond Public Schools.  
[https://okpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/20QUEST\\_schoolFinance\\_EPS.pdf?x43134](https://okpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/20QUEST_schoolFinance_EPS.pdf?x43134)

## VOUCHERS

The LWVUS is a member of the [National Coalition for Public Education](#), which opposes vouchers.

According to the organization GreatSchools, a source of information and advocacy for parents who want to improve educational experiences for their children, a voucher “allows parents to use public funds to pay for some or all of their child’s private school tuition. Vouchers are created and distributed by state governments, in most cases” ([GreatSchools](#)). Voucher programs have existed since 1991. Originally, vouchers were developed to give children in low-income families options for better school experiences. The idea has spread to 12 states and Washington D.C. Voucher programs have met with resistance for a variety of reasons.

GreatSchools reports that:

Voucher programs are politically contentious. They often face harsh scrutiny from critics who say they blur the lines between church and state or destroy public education because they drain much-needed resources from public schools and lack the oversight that exists in public institutions. Advocates contend that these programs provide families, especially those who cannot afford private school tuition, with alternatives when a school or school system fails. They also argue that parents should not have to pay for schooling twice (in both taxes and tuition). As well, vouchers are promoted as a way to improve public education by introducing competition.

Vouchers have not necessarily led to improved school performance for students who use them. Cory Turner reported in an NPR interview on *All Things Considered*:

The research on vouchers is really hotly debated. There's one 2007 overview of voucher research that found some positive results for African-American students. But there are also a lot of important caveats in that research. A more recent review from 2011 found voucher students doing roughly the same as public school kids, really no better. And some of the newest research frankly - we heard a little bit of it in Eric's piece there - out of Louisiana and Ohio both found some negative academic effects for voucher students. ([School Vouchers 101](#))

A recent report, sponsored by the Center for American Progress, on the effectiveness of vouchers, stated:

While choice in the education sector can spur innovation and offer parents and children options to best meet individualized needs, evidence indicates that voucher programs do not improve results for students and will not achieve that aim. Indeed, vouchers will likely hurt student growth and lower overall outcomes. ([Boser, Benner, & Roth, March 2018, para. 46](#))

Oklahoma has had a voucher program called the Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarship for Students with Disabilities Program (LNH) since 2010. This program was challenged in the courts, but it was upheld in 2016 by the State Supreme Court ([Palmer](#)). In 2017, the program was extended to include children in foster homes. Other states, notably Arizona, have gradually expanded the groups of children eligible for vouchers. To be eligible for the voucher in Oklahoma, students must have an individual education plan (IEP) and have attended an Oklahoma public school one year before receiving the voucher. Exceptions are made for children in active military families and for children who were in the program for infants and children with developmental delays. There are no enrollment limits for Oklahoma vouchers. According to the Education Commission of the States, a nonpartisan interstate compact on education, the value of the voucher is either “the state's per-pupil amount, including grade and disability weights for the applicable school year, or the amount of the private school's tuition and fees, whichever is less. The state may retain 2.5 percent of the voucher amount for administrative services.” There are no testing requirements for participants. “Schools that receive vouchers must:

- Meet state's accreditation standards.
- Demonstrate fiscal soundness and in operation for at least one year.
- Be accountable to parents for meeting students' academic and emotional needs.
- Teachers must have baccalaureate degrees or higher or meet certain requirements.
- Adhere to the school's published disciplinary procedures before expelling a participating student.
- Comply with all state laws applicable to private schools.”

([Education Commission of the States](#))

Parents who accept the LNH scholarship for their children must agree that (1) the student is no longer entitled to receive special education and related services from any Oklahoma public school district and (2) each Oklahoma public school district must treat the student as a nondisabled student for all purposes, including discipline. ([Notification, n.d.](#))

Sixty schools are approved by the Oklahoma State Department of Education to accept voucher students. ([Lindsey Nicole Henry Approved Private Schools](#)). Palmer reported that “about 60 percent of the Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarships provided, or just under \$1.5 million, was spent at religious schools” (2017). One objection to voucher programs is that they funnel public school funds to private and religious schools.

Other types of funding innovations like vouchers are education savings accounts, tuition tax credits, and Title I portability ([Types of Vouchers](#)). Oklahoma does have a tax credit program, The Oklahoma Equal Opportunity Education Scholarships, as well as vouchers. The [National Coalition for Public Education](#) has compiled resources supporting its opposition to vouchers. The group [EdChoice](#) has compiled resources supporting its advocacy for more school choice.

The Oklahoma State School Boards Association has made this statement about vouchers:

Vouchers, also known as education savings or scholarship accounts, aren't a solution for helping build a solid education foundation for Oklahoma's children. We urge legislators to work with parents and education leaders at all levels for real solutions to support the 693,000 students in their public schools. ([Vouchers/ESAS](#))

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# CHARTER SCHOOLS

## What is a Charter School?

Charter schools are public, tuition-free schools that are open to all students. They are often operated independently from the traditional school district. They are allowed greater flexibility and don't have to adhere to the Teacher and Leader Effectiveness standards set by the state of Oklahoma, but charters that do not meet performance standards may be closed by their sponsors (authorizers). A charter school maintains its own board of governance in addition to being accountable to their sponsor (authorizer). The sponsor is responsible for advising and closely monitoring charter school leadership ([Oklahoma State Department of Education \[OSDE, 2017, Dec.\]](#)).

## Oklahoma Law

The Oklahoma Charter Schools Act was passed in 1999.

The Act listed the following purposes:

- Improve student learning
- Increase learning opportunities
- Provide additional academic choices for parents and students
- Require the measurement of student learning and create different and innovative forms of measuring student learning
- Establish new forms of accountability for schools
- Create new professional opportunities for teachers and administrators including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site

There are no for-profit charter school organizations in Oklahoma. The 1999 law specifies that charter school organizations must be nonprofit and provides the following list of possible sponsors or authorizers:

- A school district or a technology center with average daily membership (ADM) of 5,000 in counties with more than 500,000 residents
- A school district or technology center with a school site in school improvement
- A member of The Oklahoma State System of Higher Education that has a teacher education program within districts with ADM of 5,000 in counties with more than 500,000 residents.
- A member of The Oklahoma State System of Higher Education with a teacher education program may sponsor a charter within a school district with a school site in school improvement.
- A federally recognized Indian Tribe, if the charter is for the purpose of native language immersion.
- The State Board of Education only when the applicant is the Office of Juvenile Affairs (OJA) or when the charter has a contract with the OJA. ([OSDE, 2017, Dec.](#))

The 1999 law was amended in 2015 allowing charter schools in rural areas.

All or part of a traditional public school may be converted into a charter school. However, state law does prohibit an entire district from become a charter school site.

## Authorizers or Sponsors of Charter Schools (2017)

AUTHORIZERS	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS
• Cherokee Nation	1
• Langston University	4
• Oklahoma State University	1
• Tulsa Public Schools	6
• University of Oklahoma	1
• Oklahoma City Public Schools	10
• State Board of Education	1
• Canadian Public Schools	1

According to Eric Doss from OPSRC, another authorizer is Rose State College (personal communication, February, 2018). It is the authorizer for a blended virtual and brick and mortar charter with campuses in Oklahoma City and Tulsa. One of the goals of this particular concept is to give parents more choices especially for those who work outside of the home and want their child to attend a virtual school. Students have the option of attending daily or part-time. Subject standards are worked on as opposed to taking particular classes ([Eger](#)).

## Entities

In addition to an authorizer or sponsor for the charter school is the entity that actually runs the schools. Some of those entities are: KIPP Reach Academy Charter School, Inc., Lighthouse Academy Inc., Insight School of Oklahoma LLC, ASTEC, Families for Excellence, Inc., Harper Academy, Inc., Collegiate Hall, Inc., etc. Some entities are national organizations and others are local. The entities by law are nonprofit.

Some of the responsibilities of the entities are:

- Create a board—a majority of board members are required to complete State Department of Education Charter Training. Almost all need to reside with the district where the charter is located. Resumes need to be provided. Dates of board meetings are to be listed and at least four meetings are required per year.
- Provide a mission statement
- Appoint a treasurer to account for revenues and costs of programs of the school (transportation, child nutrition, special education, counseling, gifted and talented, etc.)
- Provide a plan for insurance
- Provide a plan for student recruitment
- Provide an academic plan. The charter may offer a curriculum that emphasizes a specific learning philosophy or style in the subject areas. Charters for school grades 9-12 have to show that they comply with graduation requirements.
- Provide survey results, petitions and crowd source funding that demonstrates community support of application
- Hire teachers and other staff with provided job descriptions that are in compliance with employment law.
- File annual report about enrollment, testing curriculum, finances and employees
- Secure and possibly recreate a site building. Maintain that building. ([OSDE, 2017, Dec.](#))

## Rural Charter Schools

In 2015 the Charter School Law was amended allowing charters statewide. In the original law, charter schools were only allowed in urban areas. The amendment opened the way for charters to be established in rural areas.



In January 2017 The State Board of Education ruled unanimously that if a local school board won't sponsor a valid charter school application, the State Board of Education may instead. The law allows the State Board of Education to sponsor up to five charter schools per year if the applicant had been twice denied by the local school district ([Palmer, 2017](#)).

Oklahoma's first rural charter school is Carlton Landing Academy, which is located in a small community on Lake Eufaula. It was formerly a private school and is now a public charter school sponsored by the Canadian Public Schools. The Seminole Public Schools had twice rejected the application for the Academy of Seminole. The State Board instead will be sponsoring the school. The Academy of Seminole will be the second rural charter school to open in 2018 ([Palmer, 2016](#)). The idea of a charter school in Seminole was started by businessman, Paul Campbell who was concerned about the ACT scores in Seminole county. The Academy of Seminole will open on the Seminole State College campus. The Pre-K through 8<sup>th</sup> grade school will be based on classical curriculum, with a focus on reading and the 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades will focus on STEM ([Saegert](#)).

Another charter school that will open soon as a result of the change in the charter school law in 2015 is the Le Monde School in Norman. It is set to open in the fall of 2018 and will be a French and Spanish immersion school for grades Pre-kindergarten through 4<sup>th</sup> grade. The idea of an immersion school grew out of parent frustration with Oklahoma budget cuts that resulted in large cuts to the Norman Public School leading to the discontinuation of Reagan Elementary's Partial French Immersion Program. The authorizer for the Le Monde School is the Oklahoma State Board of Education. The entity that will be running the school is Le Monde International School ([Lee](#)).

The fear among rural areas is that charters will take funds away from districts that are already strapped for needed operating and instructional costs.

## **Charter Schools for Juvenile Offenders in Detention Centers**

The Oklahoma Board of Education is the authorizer for the Oklahoma Youth Academy that has campuses in Tecumseh and Manitou. The traditional schools inside the detention centers were converted to a charter school system to offer greater flexibility to a population of students who have special needs and large gaps in their education. Their mission is to provide an individual education, which encompasses academic, social, emotional and employment skills for highly challenged youth in a non-traditional setting with encouragement of self-worth and determination. One of the main goals is to help youth toward realizing their true potential ([Oklahoma Office of Juvenile Affairs](#)).

## **Who Can Attend Charter Schools?**

Oklahoma Charter schools cannot limit admission based on ethnicity, national origin, gender, income level, disabling conditions, English proficiency, achievement levels, aptitude, or athletic ability. They may enroll students whose legal residence is within the boundaries of the school district in which the school is located or who have transferred into the school district. Preferences are given to resident students, siblings of students who are already attending, and those who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunches. (E. Doss, personal communication, February 2018). If capacity is insufficient to enroll all interested eligible students, the charter school must select students through a lottery. Lotteries have to be random and in an academic enterprise zone in which 60% or more of the children who reside in the area qualify for free or reduced-price school lunches ([OSDE, 2017, Dec.](#)). Students who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) are served in the charter school according to their needs and the IEP that is developed by a team. The process is the same as in a traditional school.

A student who is outside of a district can apply to a charter if the contract with the sponsor or authorizer allows it. Tulsa does not allow charters to take students from outside of its district. Otherwise, students have to go

through the transfer process just as if they are transferring from one school district to another. According to the Charter School law of 1999, charters are to give enrollment preference to students within their districts. (E. Doss, personal communication, April 2018)

## Recruitment

Charter schools recruit students by advertising in the local papers and on radio spots, by knocking on doors, and yard signs. Recruitment is usually started in February for the coming school year (E. Doss, personal communication, February 2018). *The Oklahoman* did an analysis of applications for the state's charter schools applications and found that the application process can be a barrier ([Felder, 2017, July](#)). Several charter schools in the state require parents to explain their child's academic abilities in detail, pledge a commitment to volunteer at the school or have the student submit an essay. Some applications require a recommendation from a teacher, ask for details on a student's discipline history or if they have received special education services. However, some charter schools ask for nothing more than a student's name and contact information.

Brad Clark, general counsel to the State Board of Education, has said that because student demographics and abilities are not to be considered in enrollment decisions, asking for those details on an application could violate Oklahoma law.

## Oklahoma Charter School Demographics Compared to Oklahoma Demographic Averages ([OSDE, 2017, January](#))

	Brick and Mortar Charter	Traditional Public School
Population:		
Black	25.86%	8.77 %
Asian/Pacific Islanders	15.08%	2.39%
Hispanic	40.52%	17.23%
Native American	2.76%	13.59%
White	12.93%	49.36%
Two or more races	2.84%	8.78%

Charter School enrollment is 2.92% of the total Oklahoma school enrollment ([OSDE, 2015](#)).

Ben Felder reported that: While Oklahoma's charter school enrollment has exploded over the past several years—nearly 20,000 between virtual and traditional—it still accounts for a small portion of the state's total public school enrollment of 693,710, based on last year's count. He added that the growth in enrollment in charter schools fell from 17.4% in 2015 to 3.8% in 2016 ([2017, August](#)).

## Teachers

Teachers at charter schools are not required to be certified. However, the charter contract must include provisions about teacher and personnel certification and qualifications. Teacher certification may not necessarily be in the area in which the teacher is teaching. The law has been interpreted to mean that charter schools are not required to hire certified staff, as certified staff is not specifically mentioned in the Oklahoma Charter School Act ([OSDE, 2017, December](#)). Daniel Craig Ed. D., the executive director of the Oklahoma Office of Educational Quality and Accountability stated that with his experiences most charter school teachers are or were certified and needed to be to meet No Child Left Behind requirements (personal communication, January 1, 2018). With No Child Left Behind (NCLB) being replaced by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) not all teachers are required to be highly qualified, so the numbers may be changing. Charter schools are not required to follow the state's minimum teaching salary requirements. Charter school teachers can be paid below or above state minimums. However, most charter schools seek to be competitive in regard to teacher salaries with the traditional public schools. Charters must have a contract with sponsoring school districts before entering into employment contracts with teachers and support staff. The contract with the school districts must establish salaries. Charter schools are exempt from teacher due process and collective

bargaining. Charter school teachers have access to the state's teacher retirement system ([Education Commission of the States](#) [ECS]).

## **Transportation**

The charter school is responsible for transportation, but only within the boundaries of the school district where it is located.

## **Financial**

Charter schools that are under a public school system umbrella are financed through that public school. All others are financed through the state. Charter schools receive the state aid allocation and other state-appropriated revenue generated for their students according to the same state aid funding formula as traditional public schools. Up to 5% of a school's allocation (Average Daily Membership) may be retained by its sponsor for administrative fees. Charter schools are eligible to receive other forms of aid and grants as are to traditional schools. The governing body (entity) of a charter school cannot levy taxes or issue bonds. The Charter Schools Incentive Fund provides start-up and planning grants for charter schools. The state department of education allocates per-pupil funds to match funds allocated through the federal State Charter Schools Facilities Incentive Grant Programs. The Charter School Incentive Fund provides support for costs associated with renovating or remodeling existing buildings for use by a charter school. The department of education allocates per-pupil funds to match funds allocated through the federal State Charter School Facilities Incentive Grants Programs. Also, the Common School Building Equalization Fund provides aid for acquiring buildings. To qualify, charter schools have to provide matching funds of not less than 10% of the total grant. The maximum grant award is \$4 million. Charter Schools are eligible for tax-exempt financing through the Oklahoma Development Finance Authority ([OSDE, 2017, Dec.](#)). Charters can receive federal title funds and IDEA funds. Charter schools do not receive local funds such as ad valorem taxes and aren't always included in local bond issues.

The Oklahoma Public Charter School Association is suing the state Board of Education over the funding allocated to charter schools, arguing that it is inequitable. OK charter schools are eligible for state and federal funding but not local tax revenue. The Oklahoma City and Tulsa Schools have filed motions to intervene in the lawsuit, in opposition stating that they could lose an estimated \$1.5 million each with monies being diverted to brick and mortar charters located within their districts ([Palmer, 2017, November](#)).

Oklahoma will receive \$16.5 million in federal funds to open and expand charter schools across the state. This funding boost will significantly increase the number of new charter schools opening in the coming years ([Oklahoma receives](#)).

## **Private Funds**

Charter schools are allowed to solicit and accept private funds as are public traditional schools. A \$1 million grant from Inasmuch Foundation will help fund the addition of the middle school grades to the John Rex Charter School in Oklahoma City, which will begin in the fall of 2018 at Myriad Botanical Gardens. Inasmuch Foundation is also committing capital improvement grant up to \$700,000 for enhancements to the garden's educational spaces ([Scrivens](#)).

## **Accountability**

Charter school contracts can be approved for no longer than five years at a time and most include criteria by which effectiveness of the school will be measured. Sponsors must give written notice and explanation of their intent to deny requests for renewal at least 8 months prior to expiration of contract, its sponsor may give only 90 days written notice of intent to terminate ([OSDE, 2017, Dec.](#)). Charter schools are required to annually file a report to the office of accountability including, but not limited to, information on enrollment, testing,

curriculum, finances and employees. Charter schools are also subject to annual report card requirements ([ECS](#)).

Charters are graded on the A-F grade card like traditional schools. Charter schools can be put on probation due to academic or money issues. Plans of improvement can be given or contracts can be withdrawn. Authorizers don't have to wait until the end of the charter school contract to issue a plan of improvement or withdraw a contract. (E. Doss, personal communication, February 2018).

## Comparisons

Many factors go into overall student and school success. Because comparative data is not readily available, these charts were developed for this study. Chart 1 compares Tulsa's Collegiate Hall to the schools that feed into it. Chart 5 compares two Oklahoma City high schools that were cited in a national publication for their excellence, one charter, the other traditional. Charts 2, 3, & 4 comparisons were made using similar percentages of students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunches. All comparisons include percentages of the total Oklahoma student population. Also, all of the charts include percentages of students who are English Language Learners (ELL) and students who are on Individualized Education Plans (IEP's). Absentee averages per student were also included.

**CHART 1--Comparisons between Tulsa's charter school Collegiate Hall, schools whose former students attend that school and Oklahoma percentages ([Education Profiles, Tulsa](#))**

	SCHOOLS							
	Collegiate Hall	Grimes	Grissom	Key	Marshall	McClure	Salk	OKLA. Schools Totals
<b>Math &amp; Reading Percentages:</b>								
4th Gr. Math	58%	54%	84%	56%	22%	no data	51%	70%
4th Gr. Reading	25%	61%	80%	62%	22%	4%	62%	68%
5th Gr. Math	73%	30%	69%	52%	7%	17%	76%	71%
5th Gr. Reading	60%	61%	83%	59%	22%	31%	85%	73%
<b>Demographic %</b>								
Eligibility for free & reduced lunches	81%	83%	55%	100%	100%	100%	100%	62%
Students on IEP's	11.5%	16.7%	11.6%	16.7%	16.8%	14.3%	14.3%	15.5%
English language learners	9%	7.3%	8.8%	27.4%	26.6%	13.5%	29.4%	8.7%
Absentee averages per student	7	11.1	8.1	12.9	13.9	14.6	9.4	9.4

**CHART 2---Comparisons are shown for Tulsa high schools - charter school Tulsa School of the Arts & Sciences vs. the traditional schools Thomas Edison Preparatory, Booker T. Washington and OK school percentages 2016. ([Education Profiles Tulsa](#))**

	Tulsa School of the Arts & Sciences	Thomas Edison Preparatory	Booker T. Washington	OK Schools
<b>End of Instruction Testing passes:</b>				
Algebra I	68%	73%	89%	75%
English II	86%	89%	95%	77%
US History	70%	75%	78%	63%
Biology I	50%	57%	69%	48%
Algebra II	56%	88%	85%	72%
Geometry	72%	81%	87%	79%
English III	80%	79%	97%	82%
<b>Demographic Percentages:</b>				
Eligibility for free and reduced lunches	41%	53%	50%	62%
English Language Learners	3.3%	2.1%	2%	3.5%
Students on IEP's	12.7%	15.3%	2.7%	16%
Absentee averages per student	12.2	14.3	9	9.4

**Chart 3: Oklahoma City Schools--Comparisons of charter elementary schools vs traditional elementary schools with similar rates of eligibility for free and reduced lunches. (2016 data) ([Education Profiles Oklahoma](#))**

	Charter Schools		Traditional Schools		OK Averages
	Lighthouse Academies	Hupfeld Academy	Arthur	Buchanan	
<b>Math &amp; Reading Pass %'s:</b>					
<b>3rd Grade Math</b>	47%	67%	48%	56%	67%
<b>3rd Grade Reading</b>	47%	75%	62%	53%	72%
<b>4th Grade Math</b>	48%	86%	36%	59%	70%
<b>4th Grade Reading</b>	50%	69%	30%	57%	68%
<b>Demographic Percentages:</b>					

<b>Eligibility for free &amp; reduced lunches</b>	87%	88%	89%	89%	62%
<b>Students on IEP's</b>	5.3%	12.1%	11.6%	11.9%	15.5%
<b>English Language Learners</b>	3.0%	5.1%	48.6%	62.1%	8.7%
<b>Absentee Averages per Student</b>	10.2	5.4	11	7.4	9.4

**CHART 4--Comparisons between high schools Santa Fe Charter School and traditional U.S. Grant were made due to their similar percentages of eligibility for free and reduced lunches 2016 data. ([Education Profiles Oklahoma](#))**

	Santa Fe Charter	U.S. Grant	OK Schools
<b>End of Instruction Testing Passes:</b>			
Algebra I	47%	73%	75%
English II	70%	65%	77%
US History	59%	49%	63%
Biology I	25%	27%	48%
Algebra II	53%	71%	72%
Geometry	65%	62%	79%
English III	81%	62%	82%
<b>Demographic Percentages:</b>			
Eligibility for free and reduced lunches	90%	90%	62%
English Language Learners	21.7%	30.8%	3.5%
Students on IEP's	6.8%	16.1%	16%
Absentee averages per student	2.9	17.5	9.4

**CHART 5--Comparisons between the charter high school Harding Charter Prep, the traditional high school Classen and OK school averages. Both Classen and Harding made a top 50 list for best high schools in the US 2016 data. ([Education Profiles Oklahoma](#)) ([Pemberton, 2013](#))**

	Harding Charter Prep	Classen	OK High School
<b>End of Instruction Testing Passes</b>			
Algebra I	91%	82%	75%
English I	97%	95%	77%
US History	87%	89%	63%
Biology	78%	81%	48%
Algebra II	91%	93%	72%
Geometry	97%	89%	79%
English III	100%	63%	82%



<b>Demographic Percentages:</b>			
Eligibility for free and reduced lunches	51%	28%	62%
English Language Learners	3.3%	0.6%	3.5%
IEP Students	3.3%	8.8%	16.0%
	4.1	12	9.4

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## VIRTUAL SCHOOLS AND COURSES

Virtual charter schools are covered under title 70, chapter 1, article 3 of the Oklahoma Statutes. This article addresses charter schools in general. Specific sections of this article that apply to virtual charter schools are included in Appendix II, Section A)

### Virtual Schools: News and Background

On January 3, 2018, the Tulsa World published information showing that Oklahoma virtual schools were due to receive significant increases of funding from the annual midyear adjustments made by the Oklahoma State Department of Education. The article implied that an increase in enrollment was the driver behind the virtual schools funding increase. However, according to Dr. Rebecca Wilkinson, Executive Director of the Oklahoma Statewide Virtual Charter School Board, the increase in funding was largely due to the way that weighted funding is distributed. While brick and mortar schools receive their weighted funding (additional monies provided to districts if their students are low-income, have special needs or meet other criteria), virtual schools only receive their weighted funding at mid-year. Regardless of this fact, the article's basic premise, that "all four of the state's virtual school choices were among the top 20 in gaining state aid" ([Eger](#)) reflects the perceived popularity of virtual schools.

To put that statement into perspective, of the Oklahoma cities with local Leagues, only one received an increase in funds when midyear adjustments were made. Norman received slightly over a million dollars in funds. The rest lost funds.

Bartlesville lost \$299,514

Lawton lost \$98,891

Oklahoma City lost \$2,060,765

Stillwater lost \$212,792

Tulsa lost \$2,694,412

The virtual charter schools all gained funding.

EPIC gained \$13,459,297 (55.41% increase)

Insight gained \$504,245 (37.45% increase)

Oklahoma Connections gained \$2,326,023 (61.67% increase)

Oklahoma Virtual Charter Academy \$1,880,420 (21.78% increase)

Why are virtual schools (all of them charter schools) gaining in popularity? How well do they educate the children they serve? What has been their impact on traditional schools?

Virtual schools are the latest iteration of a phenomenon that began at least as far back as the 18th Century. This phenomenon was known as distance education.

In the early days of distance education, letter writing was the most widely accessible technology. In 1728, the first well-documented example of a correspondence course ran as an ad in the *Boston Gazette*, where a man named Caleb Phillips offered to teach shorthand to students anywhere in the country by exchanging letters. Almost 150 years later, in 1873, the first correspondence schools in the United States were founded, called The Society to Encourage Studies at Home. Shortly thereafter, in 1892, the University of Chicago began offering correspondence courses, becoming the first traditional educational institution in the U.S. to do so. By 1906, primary schools such as The Calvert School in Baltimore began following suit. ([Miller](#))

As technology progressed, correspondence courses became more sophisticated. When appropriate, audio tapes could supplement written materials. In the 1920s both Pennsylvania State College and Iowa State University offered courses by radio ([Miller](#)). With the advent of television, distance learning progressed even further. In early days, the "educational" channels contained little besides more than classes that students could take either for their own edification or for credit.

However, it was only in the 1980s that the real revolution in distance education took place. “In 1981 the Western Behavioral Sciences Institute's School of Management and Strategic Studies started an online program” ([Miller](#)). As one reads Miller’s concise history of distance learning, one is reminded of the constantly evolving technologies and the learning systems they supported. There was a vigorous debate over the value of both synchronous and asynchronous learning. And, ironically, there seemed to be a constant emphasis on replicating, as closely as possible, the classroom experience.

It is important to note that, until very recently, distance learning was considered inferior to the education that one could receive in an actual classroom. Those who enrolled in distance learning courses did so, for the most part, because they had no access to a traditional school. In a 1996 article, L. Sherry cites some common characteristics of distance learners: “Adult learners have a wide variety of reasons for pursuing learning at a distance: constraints of time, distance, and finances, the opportunity to take courses or hear outside speakers who would otherwise be unavailable, and the ability to come in contact with other students from different social, cultural, economic and experiential backgrounds” ([Sherry](#)).

Several groups of people have traditionally been considered as the most common enrollees in distance learning programs: (1) adults from developing countries who have no access to a university in their own country, (2) military personnel whose travel makes it almost impossible to pursue a traditional education, and (3) adults who are employed full-time and who want to complete a degree program or take courses that would enhance their employability. It must be noted that, until very recently, distance learning has focused on adults with college courses being the largest segment of all offerings. Until fifteen years ago, the only place where distance learning was widespread for elementary and secondary students was Alaska where students were so isolated that there were few schools. Today, that situation has changed radically.

As noted at the beginning of this section, there are four virtual charter schools in Oklahoma. From the largest to the smallest, according to a 2016 report from the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, they are EPIC One-on-One Charter School, Oklahoma Virtual Charter Academy, Oklahoma Connections Academy, and Insight School of Oklahoma ([Office of Educational Quality and Accountability OEQA](#)). This four-page report provides a good overview of who attends virtual charter schools and how well they do on state examinations. Chart 1 shows the racial composition of the study body of each of the virtual charter schools as it compares to all students in the state. Chart 2 shows the percentage of students whose test scores showed that they were proficient in math and reading in 2016.

Chart 1: Who attends virtual charter schools?

### 2016 Fall Enrollment by Race

	Total	White	Black	American Indian	Asian	Two or More Races	Hispanic
STATE TOTAL	693,710	342,418	60,843	96,703	16,245	60,893	116,608
		49.4%	8.8%	13.9%	2.3%	8.8%	16.8%
VIRTUAL CHARTERS (4)	13,166	8,508	1,048	1,741	147	504	1,218
		64.6%	8.0%	13.2%	1.1%	3.8%	9.3%
EPIC	9,077	5,932	784	1,351	102	28	880
		65.4%	8.6%	14.9%	1.1%	0.3%	9.7%
OVCA	2,429	1,514	180	251	31	274	179
		62.3%	7.4%	10.3%	1.3%	11.3%	7.4%
OKCA	1,246	802	68	108	11	141	116
		64.4%	5.5%	8.7%	0.9%	11.3%	9.3%
ISOK	414	260	16	31	3	61	43
		62.8%	3.9%	7.5%	0.7%	14.7%	10.4%

([OEQA](#))

First, it should be noted that fewer than 2% of all Oklahoma students were enrolled in a virtual charter school in 2016. Although enrollment has increased since that time, virtual charter schools do not yet come close to enrolling even 10% of Oklahoma students. It should also be noted that virtual charter schools do not mirror all state schools in terms of their ethnic composition. While slightly less than half of all Oklahoma students are white, almost two-third of virtual charter schools are white. Students who are of two or more races and Hispanic students are underrepresented at virtual charter schools.

An article published in January of 2018 also sheds some light on why students choose to study at a virtual school rather than at a traditional school. According to this article, 41% of all students who attend a virtual school cite bullying as the reason they left a traditional school. 34% cite problems with school administration or staff ([Felder](#)).

However, recent research into course offerings in Oklahoma's traditional schools suggests that virtual schools may be attractive because they offer courses that traditional schools, particularly smaller ones, do not. The list of courses offered at the Oklahoma Virtual Charter Academy includes six different languages (with four years of French, German and Spanish) offered. Science classes include earth science, biology, chemistry and physics (with regular and honors tracks for each).

Compare these offerings to the fact that, according to an article in Education Week, 68.6% of all Oklahoma high schools do not offer physics ([Heitin](#)). And, a recent Oklahoma Watch study found that the number of Oklahoma high schools that didn't offer a single world language class almost quadrupled from 39 in 2006 to 149 in 2016 ([Palmer, 2017](#)).

The situation is similarly bleak in Oklahoma schools offering calculus. A 2016 Oklahoma Watch study showed that Oklahoma ranks near the bottom of states in the percentage of schools offering calculus. "The latest state rankings available from the U.S. Education Department – from the 2011-2012 school year – show that Oklahoma had the third lowest percentage of schools reporting they offered calculus, with 34 percent, just above Alaska and North Dakota" ([Palmer, 2016](#)). From these studies, it is not difficult to understand why a student or a parent would like to find a better education than that afforded by most public schools. However, despite the richness of their offerings, do virtual charter schools actually deliver a better education?

Chart 2

**Percent Students Scoring Proficient and Above: 2016**  
**Reading and Math**  
**All Students (FAY and NFAY)**

Reading	3	4	5	6	7	8
STATE TOTAL	71.6%	67.8%	72.2%	63.1%	70.7%	74.6%
EPIC	44.9%	51.6%	53.4%	56.5%	59.7%	61.7%
OVCA	43.0%	50.9%	60.4%	51.3%	63.0%	66.9%
OKCA	31.8%	55.8%	66.0%	63.5%	75.3%	85.3%
ISOK					37.5%	44.4%
Math	3	4	5	6	7	8
STATE TOTAL	66.1%	69.2%	70.5%	66.4%	65.7%	53.0%
EPIC	34.2%	36.2%	43.2%	43.5%	43.7%	24.8%
OVCA	24.7%	43.0%	47.9%	47.4%	50.3%	46.5%
OKCA	30.2%	48.1%	38.0%	46.2%	61.6%	39.4%
ISOK					6.3%	3.7%

The graph above shows how students at the four charter schools perform in reading and math. It should be noted that the scores provided are for all students. This includes low income and special needs students. It also includes those who attended virtual charter schools for less than a full academic year. Only one of the virtual schools surpassed the state performance average in reading. Oklahoma Charter Academy 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and



8<sup>th</sup> grade students did so. However, the percentage of students who scored proficient and above in the lower grades at all schools are quite low. And, none of the schools managed to match or exceed the state average percentage in math.

Further evidence of the issues surrounding virtual charter schools can be found in the extensive reports that have been done by the Oklahoma School Performance Review. Three of the four virtual charter schools (EPIC, Insight and the Oklahoma Virtual Charter Academy) have had these reviews conducted at the request of the Oklahoma Statewide Virtual Charter School Board. It is to the Board's credit that they have sought to compare these schools to traditional brick and mortar schools. Each review is approximately 250 pages long and includes comments on the school's physical plant as well as numerous surveys of parents, students and teachers. The reviews can be downloaded from the Oklahoma School Performance Review website: ([OEQA, 2017](#)).

It is worth scanning at least one of these reviews to gauge the variety of reactions to the virtual charter school experience. They run the gamut from a student who resents having to "show up" for group activities to the parent who is elated that her child was able to complete second grade in a matter of months ... something that her local school would not allow. It is also important to note that each of the virtual charter schools is compared to three traditional schools with similar characteristics.

## **Supplemental Course Offerings**

You don't have to be enrolled in one of Oklahoma's four virtual charter schools to take an online course. There is an extensive program of supplemental course offerings ([Oklahoma Supplemental](#)). The course catalog is 156 pages long and supplies information such as the title of the course, the name of the course provider, the cost of the course (with or without instructor) and the grades for which the course is appropriate.

You can search for a course by grade (pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade), subject (there are 20 different categories), and provider (all the courses are offered by one of three providers: Fuel Education, Connections Education or Edgenuity Inc). The website also provides a designation for each course. The four designations provided are: College Board Approved, NCAA Eligible, Accredited by AdvancED, and State Certified.

The rules for supplemental online courses are outlined in Title 210 Oklahoma State Department of Education, Chapter 15 Curriculum and Instruction and Subchapter 34 Supplemental Online Course Procedures and Title 777 Statewide Virtual Charter School Board, Chapter 15 Oklahoma Supplemental Online Course Certification of the Oklahoma Administrative Code ([Office of Administrative Rules](#)). Title 210 focuses on the rights and responsibilities of the student and the local schools and districts. All students have the right to take supplemental online courses provided they do not duplicate courses already taken. A district cannot prevent a student from taking a supplemental online course, but it is the student's responsibility to provide their own equipment and internet access.

There are strict attendance requirements for students taking online courses. However, these requirements tend to be couched in terms of progress rather than answering to some kind of electronic roll call. Students who take online courses are eligible to participate in extracurricular and co-curricular activities. This contrasts with students who are enrolled in one of the virtual charter schools. They are also required to take the same state-level academic assessments as other students.

The Title 777 guidelines focus more on the criteria that a virtual course must meet to be included in the list of courses approved by the Statewide Virtual Charter School Board. They must be approved as vendors by the Oklahoma Management and Enterprise System (OMES). They must also adhere to certain pricing guidelines. There are a total of nine pieces of information that must be provided for a course to be considered including a highly detailed syllabus. There are also criteria for a course to remain in good standing.