

Alabama Charter Application for a 2022 Opening

New Charter Application #000627

Empower Community School

Submitted To:

Alabama Public Charter School Commission
Alabama Charter School Commission
50 North Ripley St.
P.O. Box 302101
Montgomery, AL 36104

Phone: 334-694-4908

Submitted By:

Anthony Oliver
5122 Windsor Parc Drive Bessemer, Alabama 35022

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GENERAL

A. School Information

Open Date: August 1, 2022
Proposed Name: Empower Community School
School Type: Elementary / Middle
Grade Levels: [K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8]
School District: Bessemer City Schools
Neighborhood / Community:
Organization Type: Non-profit Corporation
Sponsoring Entity: Non-profit Organization
Address: PO Box 975 Bessemer, Alabama 35021
Phone: 2053543709
Fax:
Web Site: www.empoweral.org
Calendar Type: Standard - 180 instructional days
Educational Service Provider: Empower Schools of Alabama (None)

B. Primary Contact Person

Name: Anthony J Oliver
Mailing Address: 5122 Windsor Parc Drive Bessemer, Alabama 35022
Mobile Phone: 2053543709
Alternate Phone:
Email: aoliver@empoweral.org
Current Employer: Consultant

C. Attendance Projections

Grade Level	2022-23 Enrollment		2023-24 Enrollment		2024-25 Enrollment		2025-26 Enrollment		2026-27 Enrollment		At Capacity 2025-26	
	Min.	Max.	Min.	Max.	Min.	Max.	Min.	Max.	Min.	Max.	Min.	Max.
K	64	100	64	100	64	100	64	100	64	100	64	100
1	64	100	64	100	64	100	64	100	64	100	64	100
2	64	100	64	100	64	100	64	100	64	100	64	100
3			64	100	64	100	64	100	64	100	64	100
4					64	100	64	100	64	100	64	100
5							64	100	64	100	64	100
6	48	90	48	100	48	100	48	100	48	100	48	100
7	48	100	48	100	48	100	48	100	48	100	48	100
8					48	100	48	100	48	100	48	100
Total	288	490	352	600	464	800	528	900	528	900	528	900

D. Board Members

Name	Title	Contact Information	Current Employer
Brigham, Grant	Board Member	P: M: 2055270336 E: grantbrigham@gmail.com	ARC Realty
Lewis, Haley	Board Member	P: M: E: hlcolson@gmail.com	GASP
Murdock, Justin	Board Chairperson	P: M: 2059941661 E: justmurdock@yahoo.com	Protective Life
Pinkard, Cynthia Yvonne	Board Member	P: M: E: grace911@bellsouth.net	Retired-Shelby County Board of Education
Pippen-Johnson, Debra Ann	Board Member	P: M: E: debrapj@yahoo.com	Retired-U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
Rodgers, Demarcus	Board Vice Chairperson	P: M: 205-901-9171 E: drodger_13@yahoo.com	Owner-Kuntri Kitchen, LLC.
Roshell, Theo M	Board Secretary	P: M: 2056169030 E: theo_roshell@yahoo.com	Munford Enterprises
Smith, Matthew	Board Member	P: M: E: matt_smith@gse.harvard.edu	A+ Education Partnership

E. Start-up Team Members

Name	Title	Contact Information	Current Employer
Oliver, Anthony James	Founder and Chief Executive Officer	P: M: 2053543709 E: aoliver@empoweral.org	Empower Schools of Alabama
Webb, Joseph	Consultant	P: M: E: jwebb@cpeducation.org	
Williams, Troy	Consultant	P: M: E: troy.williams01@gmail.com	Independent Consultant

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Executive Summary

Mission and Vision

The mission of Empower Community School is to change in our community by forging collaboration between a diverse group of scholars, educators, families, and partners to educate the next generation of community leaders and advocates. Our vision is to become a recognized leader for collaboration and community building while preparing our scholars to excel in every academic endeavor and empowering them to advocate for themselves, their communities, and the disenfranchised. In Fall 2022, Empower Community School will open its doors to serve scholars in grades K-8 in Bessemer, AL. We will begin with students in grades K-2 and 6-7 and ramp up to full enrollment in Year 4. Our personalized approach to teaching and learning energizes scholars to own their learning, develop social, emotional, and communications skills, and become leaders in their communities.

At Empower, every aspect of our work with scholars, families, educators, and partners is grounded in our belief statements. We believe:

1. Every scholar can learn and grow in challenging academic settings with appropriate support.
2. Every scholar has unique needs, and scholars should have voice and choice in the learning process.
3. Social and emotional development is critical to academic growth.
4. Young people can lead and influence change in our society.
5. Schools are a place for equitable collaboration between educators, scholars, families, and the broader community.

Anticipated Student Population and Educational Need

Empower is excited to serve students of Bessemer and has secured two facilities, one of which is located in heart of the Northside Community. Other schools in the area are Abrams Elementary and Charles F. Hard Elementary both of which, according to 2018-2019 ALSDE State Report Card data, are performing more than 20 percentage points below the state average. Empower believes the students and families of Bessemer deserve a high-quality educational option in the community. Additionally, our unique approach to educating the whole child will support student academic, social, and emotional growth. Given the wide range of student achievement results in the area, Empower’s personalized approach to education and commitment to developing whole citizens ensures that each individual student will be provided with the instruction and support needed to excel. The below charts outline our projected enrollment and student demographics.

Enrollment By Year	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	2026-2027
K	88	88	88	88	88

1	88	88	88	88	88
2	80	84	84	84	84
3		80	84	84	84
4			80	84	84
5				80	84
6	75	75	75	75	75
7	75	75	75	75	75
8		75	75	75	75

Projected Student Demographics	Empower	Bessemer City Schools
% Black or African American	80%	83%
% Latino or Hispanic	17%	14%
% Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	0%	0%
% American Indian, Native American, Or Alaskan Native	0%	1%
% White	10%	10%
% Multiple or other race, ethnicity, or origin	5%	5%
% Free or Reduced Lunch	75%	69%

% English Language Learners	10%	7%
% Students with Special Needs	15%	12%

Educational Program Terms

While our diverse team of students, families, educators, and partners will certainly distinguish our school, Empower is also distinguished by three essential design elements undergirding our academic model:

Design Element #1: Personalized Instruction

Modern assessment tools allow us to deeply understand every student’s starting point when they walk in the door at the beginning of the year and before they receive a unit of instruction. Empower intends to leverage that technology to curate learning experiences. Students will come to Empower with varied levels of academic proficiency. In 2019, 23.10% of Bessemer students were proficient in reading and 22.30 were proficient in math.^[1] The remaining students were in need of support. Given the diverse performance and needs of students, Empower will implement a personalized approach to teaching and learning to close learning gaps while accelerating proficient students. At the beginning of each school year, students will be assessed to determine their current academic performance level. Students, teachers, and parents will then work together to create a personalized learning plan for each student. The plan will include goals, metrics, and check-in mechanisms to ensure continual progress. Every student at Empower will be assigned a mentor to meet with weekly to check-in on the student’s progress towards their goals. Once a month, the mentor will host a student-led conference with the student’s parent/guardian. The goal of the conference is for the student to have ownership and agency in their learning while advocating for the support they need to be successful.

Design Element #2: Targeted Small Group and Individual Interventions

Empower’s classroom model ensures that students have extended learning time to address learning gaps in reading and math. The goal of the power hour is to close learning gaps so that students are grade level proficient in reading and projecting mastery of Algebra I by the time they matriculate into high school. Studies have shown that successful completion of Algebra I is a strong predictor of high school graduation and success.^[2] Not only will students receive small group instruction during their normal learning block. They will have an additional 80 minutes of reading and/or math instruction during “power hour”. During “power hour”, students with learning gaps will receive specific skill based remediation while students who have mastered concepts will engage in extension exercises to deepen their learning.

Design Element #3: Comprehensive Social Emotional Learning

Empower believes social and emotional development is paramount to student academics success. “SEL programs are among the most successful youth-development programs offered to school-age youth. SEL programming improved students’ achievement test scores by 11 to 17

percentile points, indicating that they offer students a practical educational benefit.^[3] Empower will implement Edgenuity's Purpose Prep SEL curriculum. Used by over 500,000 students in more than 30 countries, Purpose Prep contains over 1000 hours of age appropriate content via 600 plus instructional videos. The content can be delivered in-person or virtually and is aligned to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) competencies, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) best practices. All Empower students will engage in SEL curriculum for 30 minutes daily.

Community Engagement

Empower has hosted a number of virtual community engagement events and has connected with over 40 parents, teachers, and potential supplemental program providers. The school is looking forward to continuing its community engagement, including partnering with local organizations to inform families and community members about the school. We are also excited to work with the Bessemer Redevelopment Corporation, a 501c3 organizations with a mission to improve the quality of life for residents across Bessemer. The organization has invested heavily in the Northside neighborhood, and Empower is excited to partner with Bessemer Redevelopment Corporation and the broader community to bring high-quality educational options to the area.

Goals

Academic Achievement

Goal 1: In year 1, students will achieve 1.5 years of growth in reading and mathematics on the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Map Growth Assessment.

Goal 2: Empower Community School students will exceed district and state proficiency averages in reading, math, and science on the Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program Exam.

Goal 3: Students will be able to express their thoughts using various methods of communication, including written and verbal communication. Students will be able to form their thoughts and opinions from a diverse group of sources.

Community Building and Scholar Leadership

Goal 1: Students will be able to lead within and outside of their school community, actively voicing both positive and negative opinions through an objective lens.

Goal 2: Students will value the importance of education and become advocates for education for themselves and others.

Goal 3: Students will be comfortable communicating and collaborating with diverse stakeholders.

Social Emotional Development and Restorative Practices

Goal 1: Students will understand their own identity and emotions and how they impact and influence those around them.

Goal 2: Students will be able to actively listen to others with the conversational skills and humility to know when to affirm or challenge individuals.

Goal 3: Students will treat others with respect, seeking first to understand others before they are understood. When this respect is broken, community members will be able to process the harm and support each other in making the offender and offended whole again.

Ultimately, we will know we are successful when students leave Empower possessing the academic, social, and emotional skills to be successful in the most challenging high schools available.

[1] ALSDE Department of Education School Report Card. Retrieved from: reportcard.alsde.edu. 20 September 2020

[2] Laby, Erik; West, Russell; Volovh, Daniel. "Algebra as a Gateway Keeper to Post-Secondary Success". *New Visions for Public Schools*. 15 June 2015

[3] Payton, John et. Al. "Emotional Learning for Kindergarten to Eighth Grade Students: Findings from Three Scientific Reviews". Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. December 2008.

Attachments

Section 1: Executive Summary

1.1	Attachment 1-Leadership Team Bios and Resumes	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 6:54 PM	PDF / 1.685 MB
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EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM DESIGN AND CAPACITY

1. Program Overview

The Empower School Flex Model of Instruction: How We Reimagine the Classroom Experience

The Empower program reimagines the rigidity classrooms with rows of desks and tightly held bell schedules that limit access and opportunity to a high quality education for Birmingham children. Empower instead imagines a flexible instructional model with three distinct design develop the “whole-child,” these elements are:

1. Deeply personalized learning experiences
2. Targeted small group interventions
3. Comprehensive Social and Emotional Learning

The typical classroom utilizes a fixed model of how students learn and how schools spend time saying to students “learn this on our time and in our way.” Yet, the Association of Middle Level Education lists developmental responsiveness, challenging academics, student empowerment, and equitable learning opportunities as key tenets for effective young adolescent education.^[1] Empower embraces this approach by designing a flexible learning model with daily data driven learning cycles to close previous learning gaps and ensure standards mastery while simultaneously fostering student social, emotional, and leadership development in a safe, nurturing environment.

A flexible model is grounded in research. In fact, the three design elements of our flex model are considered to be the most powerful way to drive student achievement. Renowned educator and researcher John Hattie synthesized 252 factors that impact student achievement. The research determined that the average effect size of these 252 factors is .40. Towards the top of the list is Response to Intervention (RTI), with an effect size of 1.20.^[2] RTI is a tiered approach to learning that aims to identify learning gaps and provide comprehensive academic and behavioral support for all students. The three tiers high-quality classroom instruction, targeted interventions, and intensive interventions ensure every student grows academically.^[3] Empower’s personalized learning model is rooted in the RTI process and identifies the standards, skills, and behaviors that each student must learn to be successful in a rigorous academic environment.

Each school day begins with student goal setting. Students will receive the prior day’s formative assessment results and the current day’s learning target. Students then work with teachers to outline how previous learning gaps will be addressed while also tackling the current standards. In a typical 100 minute learning block students will rotate through three stations: direct instruction, group and/or performance based learning, and individualized learning. When necessary, teachers and students will continue to work on previous learning blocks during the math and/or reading “power hours” later in the day. Ultimately, our goal is at the beginning and end of every day, every student feels empowered to own their learning and supported in reaching their individual goals.

Design Element #1: Personalized Instruction

Modern assessment tools allow us to deeply understand every student’s starting point when they

walk in the door at the beginning of the year and before they receive a unit of instruction. Empower intends to leverage that technology to curate learning experiences. Students will come to Empower with varied levels of academic proficiency. In 2019, 21.77% of Bessemer students were proficient in reading and 21.43 % were proficient in math. 49.78% of students were in need of support in reading, and 39.8% of students were in need of support in math. Given the diverse performance and needs of students, Empower will implement a personalized approach to teaching and learning to close learning gaps while accelerating proficient students. At the beginning of each school year, students will be assessed to determine their current academic performance level. Students, teachers, and parents will then work together to create a personalized learning plan for each student. The plan will include goals, metrics, and check-in mechanisms to ensure continual progress. Every student at Empower will be assigned a mentor to meet with weekly to check-in on the student's progress towards their goals. Once a month, the mentor will host a student-led conference with the student's parent/guardian. The goal of the conference is for the student to have ownership and agency in their learning while advocating for the support they need to be successful.

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Design Element #3: Comprehensive Social Emotional Learning

Empower believes social and emotional development is paramount to student academics success. "SEL programs are among the most successful youth-development programs offered to school-age youth. SEL programming improved students' achievement test scores by 11 to 17 percentile points, indicating that they offer students a practical educational benefit."^[5] Empower will implement Edgenuity's Purpose Prep SEL curriculum. Used by over 500,000 students in more than 30 countries, Purpose Prep contains over 1000 hours of age appropriate content via 600 plus instructional videos. The content can be delivered in-person or virtually and is aligned to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) competencies, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) best practices. All Empower students will engage in SEL curriculum for 30 minutes daily.

An Assessment Regime to Support a Flexible Instructional Model

Data-driven instruction is central to Empower's academic program. In order to deliver on each design element mentioned in this application the school must put the assessment regime front and center to supporting our program. Empower will use a variety of assessment strategies to ensure students are progressing towards their academic and SEL goals. Formative assessments are used to check daily progress, interim assessments are used to assess student growth, and summative assessments are used to assess student learning connected to specific grade level standards. The chart below outlines some of our planned assessments, frequency, and associated artifacts, which is where evidence of the tool/strategy will be housed. The list is not

comprehensive. For instance, students who receive special services will take additional assessments relative to services received. Those assessments are further explained in the special populations section of the application.

An Assment Program to Support The Relmaged Classroom Experience

How we'll measure the impact of the Empower Community School Program:

- 95% of students report feeling empowered to own their own learning
- 95% of students are setting relevant goals at the beginning of each day
- 90% of parents report having an understanding of their students monthly progress goal
- 90% of parents participate in student led conferencing and school surveys

[1] Association of Middle Level Education. Retrieved from www.alme.org September 18, 2020

[2] Hattie Ranking: 252 Influences and Effect Sizes Related to Student Achievement. Retrieved from <https://visible-learning.org/hattie-ranking-influences-effect-sizes-learning-achievement/> . September 18, 2020

[3] RTI Action Network. Retrieved from <http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/what/whatisrti>. September 18, 2020

[4] Laby, Erik; West, Russell; Volovh, Daniel. "Algebra as a Gateway Keeper to Post-Secondary Success". *New Visions for Public Schools*. 15 June 2015

[5] Payton, John et. Al. "Emotional Learning for Kindergarten to Eighth Grade Students: Findings from Three Scientific Reviews". Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. December 2008.

Attachments

Section 1: Program Overview

– No Attachments –

2. Curriculum and Instructional Design

Empower's academic model is rooted in strong tier I instruction and personalized learning for all students. The success of our model is dependent on appropriate teacher-student ratios, curricula choices, and instructional methods. Every K-2 classroom will consist of 20 students being served by a teacher and instructional aide. In grades 3-5, there will be 20 students in a class with 1 instructional aide for each grade level yielding a teacher student ratio of 16:1. In grades 6-8, students will be housed in learning labs consisting of 50 students, 2 core teachers, and instructional support for a ratio of 17:1. The learning lab is designed to create space for student independence, collaborative learning, and intensive remediation and/or acceleration dependent on student academic needs while ensuring students are empowered while receiving developmentally appropriate instruction as recommended by the Association of Middle Level Education.^[1] The blended curricula choices and corresponding class schedules for each grade band ensure teachers have the materials to differentiate learning and provide the academic, social, and emotional support students need to thrive in a rigorous academic environment.

K-5: Framework for Instructional Design

Learning Environments

Our K-2 learning environments use a workshop approach to learning. During every lesson, there is time allocated for whole class instruction, small group instruction, independent practice, collaborative group work, and reflection. The workshop approach combined with our 10:1 teacher-student ratio prepares students to engage in the learning in whole group setting, build social and emotional skills in small groups, and foster independence through individualized instruction. In grades 3-5, the workshop model is expanded with an additional focus on collaborative and independent learning. The 13.33:1 teacher-student ratio provides space and time for students to receive targeted differentiated instruction.

Literacy Instructional Methods

Literacy is the foundation of all learning. With this in mind, Empower dedicates 150 minutes daily to literacy instruction in grades K-2 and 120 minutes daily in grades 3-5. A major component of

our early literacy instruction is explicit phonics instruction with an intense focus on applying phonics to everyday reading. Research has shown “the most accomplished teachers in the most effective low income schools supplemented explicit phonics instruction with coaching in which they taught students to apply phonics to their everyday reading”. Empower teachers will also incorporate high level questioning while reading text and teach students to write in response to reading. Both strategies are proven to improve learning in low income schools. ^[2] Below is a chart outlining our reading and writing workshops for grades K-5:

Mathematics Instructional Methods

Empower’s K-5 mathematics framework is modeled on the gradual release of responsibility. Based on over 50 years of research, this model suggests that academic work should begin with explicit teacher modeling, progress to joint responsibility between students and teachers, and conclude with students taking responsibility for their learning. ^[3] Every lesson begins with an activity to spark student learning, which is followed by teacher-led direct instruction. After direct instruction, teachers check for student understanding by providing a short quiz or activity. Once the data is collected from the check for understanding, teacher differentiate the lesson for students. Some students will go to math centers to work on foundational skills, others will be assigned to small groups where the teacher works with the to clarify misconceptions, and a third group would be assigned independent work. After differentiation, the teacher brings the class back together to wrap up the lesson. During this time, the teacher gauges student learning with an exit ticket, which will be used to inform the next day’s lesson. Students leave class with extra practice (homework) to work on skills and objectives that they have already mastered. ^[4]

Figure 1: HMH Framework for Mathematics Instruction

6-8: Framework for Instructional Design

Learning Environments

Our innovative learning lab is the foundation for providing students with an effective personalized learning experience during middle school. The learning lab is divided into sections for direct instruction, group work and project based learning, and independent work. Students are clustered in groups of 45-50, and each learning lab has a minimum of three instructors. Math is taught in collaboration with science while social studies is paired with English. The co-taught structure ensures a student-to-instructor ratio less than 17:1 during direct instruction.

Instructional Methods

Rigorous Direct Instruction (25 minutes)

Direct instruction is the foundation of tier I of RTI (high-quality classroom instruction). During direct instruction, teachers work with groups of 20-25 students. The lesson begins with teachers addressing learning gaps and activating students’ prior knowledge. The teacher then uses the gradual release of responsibility method (I do, we do, you do) to teach the daily learning objective. During this phase of the lesson, the teacher will explicitly model their thinking process. This modeling of the thinking process explicitly teaches students how to use meta-cognitive strategies, which has a .60 effect size. ^[4] During the “we do” or guided practice portion of the lesson, teachers work through examples with students, while clearing up student misconceptions. This is known as guided practice. To ensure students are progressing towards mastering the objectives,

teachers will check student understanding by having students complete mini tasks that require them to explain their process and reasoning. After a quick review of the mini tasks, students progress to the next portion of the lesson. Students who have mastered the objective will move on to the performance based learning task while students who are still working towards mastery will move to small group instruction.

Performance Based Learning (25 minutes)

During this phase of the learning block, students will be organized in groups of 4 to 6 to receive instruction tailored to their current place in the learning continuum. Students who are progressing towards mastery of the objective work in groups to complete performance tasks. Instead of requiring students to mimic or regurgitate the steps of a learning objective, the performance tasks require that they apply their learning to a real-life experience. For instance, a math/science performance tasks could require groups of students to use area to design a blueprint for two houses while determining which house is more energy efficient. The role of the instructor facilitating the learning tasks is to ensure students understand the instructions while letting them collaborate and grapple with the task. Throughout the process, the instructor will provide feedback to the students to ensure that they are progressing. The goal of the performance task is for students to transfer their understanding of the learning to a practical situation while sharing their process and metacognitive strategies. Transfer strategies have an effect size of .86. In addition to the academic skills gained, performance based learning tasks also provide a space for students to develop conversation, problem-solving, and collaboration skills.

Targeted Small Group Instruction (25 minutes)

Students who are not progressing towards mastery will be provided small group instruction (4-6 students) on the learning objective. During this time, the instructor will address any prior learning gaps and provide additional examples for students. Similar to the performance based learning groups, students who are receiving small group instruction will share their process and metacognitive strategies. This is an integral part of the process because it provides the instructor with an opportunity to see what and how students are thinking and clarify misconceptions. Small group instruction ensures that each student will be learning in their zone of proximal development, which allows students to work toward mastery under the guidance of their teacher. ^[5] —

Small group instruction is not only for students who have yet to master the learning objective. All students should have the opportunity to be challenged academically and stretch their thinking. Students who have mastered objectives and standards will be provided small group instruction with “stretch standards”, which are related to the current standards but above grade level. An example of this would be students who have mastered area and circumference being exposed to surface area and volume.

Individualized Practice (25 minutes)

Individualized learning is designed to solidify student learning and/or provide one on one support for students. “If the curricular aim involved calls for students to acquire a high-level cognitive skill, such as being able to evaluate the cogency of newspaper editorials, then during the instruction intended to promote their mastery of that skill, students must get plenty of practice applying this particular high-level cognitive skill. However, a student’s mastery of a truly challenging curricular aim often depends on mastery of essential building blocks and bodies of enabling knowledge.”^[6] — During this phase of the lesson, students will either practice skills and objectives that they have mastered or receive 1-to-1 support from the instructor. 10 – 15 students will be in individualized practice at a time with a 2:1 ratio of students working independently and students receiving 1-to-1 support. The instructor’s role during individualized practice is to ensure that students working

independently understand the instructions and remain on tasks while also circling around to provide direct support to the students receiving 1-to-1 support.

Curriculum Plans

Empower strives to develop independent scholars who grow academically by collaborating with others and engaging with technology as they successfully navigate a rigorous curriculum. To that note, it is imperative that our scholars develop both written and oral communication skills that allow them to process information, convey their thoughts, and advocate for their learning. Our curriculum choices are rooted in these concepts.

ELA Curriculum (Grades K-8)

Empower has chosen Savvas Learning Company's *myView (K-5)* and *myPerspectives(6-8)* as its English Language Arts Curriculum. Completely aligned to the Alabama Course of Study Standards, the curriculum received a perfect rating from edreports.org. *the curriculum* supports student vocabulary development, multiple styles of writing, and complex text via a digital learning platform that allows teachers to differentiate instruction while also providing standards-based instruction. More specifically, the curriculum provides space for students to read, write, listen, and speak about complex text from a variety of genres. A 2020 study by Savvas Learning Company showed that students of teachers using the *myPerspectives* curriculum gained 7 percentiles in reading comprehension and 9 percentiles in language use between the fall and spring administration of the NWEA Map Growth Assessment.

The curriculum is designed for student centered learning that focuses on mastery of independent reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. To achieve this goal, the curriculum implements the following concepts:

- Student Centered Learning
- Supporting the Role of Collaborative Educators
- Generative Vocabulary
- Integrated Writing
- Differentiated Support

Studies have shown that students who take ownership of their learning have higher levels of engagement, which leads to better academic performance.^[7] The Interactive Student Edition provides opportunities for students to make connections between the text and their own lives while access background information on text authors and settings. More importantly, the curriculum intentionally implements close reading strategies, collaboration opportunities, and project based exploration for students.^[8]

Mathematics Curriculum (Grades K-8)

Empower has chosen Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's *HMH Into Math* as its math curriculum for grades K-8. Completely aligned with the Alabama Course of Study, *HMH Into Math* received a perfect score (all "meets expectations") on all sections of edreports.org 2020 review. A completely blended curriculum, *HMH Into Math*, uses the gradual release of responsibility model to ensure student mastery of content.

The blended solution uses a Module Learning Arc to support students making sense of mathematical concepts. Each module begins with a diagnostic to assess students prior

knowledge. “From the diagnostic assessment, the lessons build upon **conceptual and procedural understanding** and integrate applications to build understanding and check for understanding”^[9].

In addition to its flexibility to allow teachers to differentiate instruction to address student academic needs, the curriculum supports student social and emotional development with embedded and intentional modeling and teaching of the growth mindset. *Into Math* is designed to foster the growth mindset within lessons so that it becomes a natural part of the language and practice of mathematics. Originally coined by Carol Dweck, research has shown that students with a growth mindset can grow intelligence through hard work, the use of effective strategies, and help from others when needed.^[10] The curriculum’s incorporation of growth mindset aligns directly to Empower’s goals for students to develop the academic, social, and emotional skills necessary to succeed in a global society.

Science and Social Studies Curriculum: K-8

Empower’s science and social studies curriculum will be developed by content areas teachers under the guidance of the Director(s) of Academics. Completely aligned to the Alabama Course of Study, Empower teachers will develop science and social studies curriculum aligned with our English Language Arts standards. Students at Empower will master science and social studies content while developing vocabulary, responding to text, and increasing their writing, speaking, and listening skills. In social studies, an intense focus will be placed on analyzing historical content from a culturally responsive lens while comparing multiple perspectives. In science, curriculum will be developed around the 5E model, which allows student to engage, explore, explain, elaborate, and evaluate scientific content. The 5E model is shown below.

Instructional Strategies

Empower will use a variety of instructional methods to ensure the needs of each individual student are met. Below is a chart outlining our primary instructional strategies.

Technology, Equity, and Special Populations

When used efficiently, technology is a powerful tool for instruction. As a 1-to-1 school, Empower will ensure that each student has his or her own device. Our personalized learning platform will ensure that students, instructors, and parents can access and monitor goals, progress, and assignments. All students will receive instruction and support to accelerate their learning. This includes video reviews of lessons (.88 effect size), interventions for students with learning needs (.77 effect size) and stretch activities for students who identify as gifted and talented. [5] More importantly, we provide students choice and voice in their learning, and all students will have equitable opportunities to engage in every learning phase.

[1] Association of Middle Level Education. Retrieved from www.alme.org September 18, 2020

[2] Taylor, Barbara; Pearson, P.David; Clark, Kathleen; Walpole, Sharon. “Effective Schools and Accomplished Teachers: Lessons about Primary-Grade Reading Instruction in Low Income Schools”. *The Elementary School Journal*. Volume 101, Number 2. The University of Chicago.

2000

[3] From The Formative Assessment Action Plan, by Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher, pp. 120–122, section heading “Gradual Release of Responsibility Instructional Framework.” Alexandria, VA: ASCD. Copyright 2007 by ASCD

[4] See Figure 1

[5] Kozulin, A., Gindis, B., Ageyev, V., Miller, S. (2003). Vygotsky’s educational theory and practice in cultural context. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[6] Instruction That Measures Up: Successful Teaching in the Age of Accountability (Chapter 4: Instructional Design), by W.James Popham, 2009, Alexandria, VA: ASCD

[7] Benson, P. (2001). Teaching and researching autonomy in language learning. London: Longman.

[8] Strobel Consulting, LLC. (2020). myPerspectives Research Base

[9] Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Research Foundations: Evidence Base: HMH Into Math. 2020

[10] Romero, Carissa (2015) “What We Know About Growth Mindset from Scientific Research”. Mindset Scholars Network

Attachments

Section 2: Curriculum and Instructional Design

2.1	No Title	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/17/21 2:54 PM	PDF / 53.207 KB
2.2	Attachment 2-Scope and Sequence	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/14/21 3:56 PM	PDF / 1.037 MB

3. Student Performance Standards

Alignment to the Alabama Course of Study

Empower Community School will use the performance standards outlined by Alabama Department of Education’s Courses of Study for each subject. All curriculum and course development will be completely aligned to the Alabama Courses of Study.

Grading and Promotion in Grades K-2

Students in grades K-2 will receive standards-based report cards at the end of each grading period. The report cards as well as midterm progress reports will outline the standards covered in each subject and include one of the following letter grades:

E (Excellent): Student has exceeded applicable standard.

S (Satisfactory): Student has mastered applicable standard.

N (Needs Improvement): Student has mastered significant portions of applicable standard.

U (Unsatisfactory): Student has not mastered significant portions of applicable standard.

In addition to the letter grades, student individualized learning plans will articulate exactly which portions of the standards are needed for the student to obtain mastery. If a student is in jeopardy of failing a subject for the term and/or year, the student will be referred to the school's problem solving team (PST) for support. The PST team will then meet with the parent and student to review prior academic performance, develop supports, and identify next steps for progress. Documentation of the PST meeting and any supports determined will be retained for the student's academic file.

To be promoted in grades K-2, students must show progress towards meeting the ALSDE reading and math standards. Promotion decisions are made by the Director of Academics with input from the student's teachers and parents. The timeline for promotion decisions is as follows:

January: Parents of students in danger of being retained conference with the student's teacher, Director of Student Supports, and Director of Academics to update the student's individualized learning plan, review PST documentation, and revise the plan for student success.

February – April: Monthly meetings will be held to update student progress and adjust student supports. These meetings may be held in-person, virtually, or via teleconference.

Early May – The team, including student's teacher, Director of Student Supports, and Director of Academics, meet to provide input on the student's progress and potential promotion.

Late May – The Director of Academics will provide, in writing, the final promotion decision.

Students who are retained may be promoted at the end of the summer if they progress towards reading and/or math standards during the optional summer enrichment program.

Grading and Promotion in Grades 3-8

Empower Community School will use a standard grading scale for students in grades 3-8.

Letter Grade	Score Range
A	90-100
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69

F	0-59
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Students will be promoted to the next grade based on academic credit earned during their core courses. Students must have a 60 average in each core course to be promoted to the next grade. Final course averages will be calculated by averaging the grade of each of 4 9-week grading periods.

Teachers will assess student learning using a variety of methods including, test, quizzes, projects, and classwork/homework. Grades will be entered into the system weekly so that parents will have continued access to their student’s progress.

Promotion and graduation criterion will be communicated, in writing, to parents at various times during the school year, including family orientation, open house, and student-led conferences. Empower’s grading and promotion policies will also be posted on our school website. Teachers will use the parent portal, email, and phone to consistently communicate student academic progress.

If a student is in jeopardy of failing a subject for the term and/or year, the student will be referred to the school’s problem solving team (PST) for support. The PST team will then meet with the parent and student to review prior academic performance, develop supports, and identify next steps for progress. Documentation of the PST meeting and any supports determined will be retained for the student’s academic file.

Attachments

Section 3: Student Performance Standards

3.1	Attachment 5 - 8th Grade Exit Standards	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 12:41 PM	PDF / 411.778 KB
3.2	Attachment 4 - Proposed Learning Standards	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 12:41 PM	PDF / 613.39 KB

4. High School Graduation Requirements (High Schools Only)

N/A

Attachments

Section 4: High School Graduation Requirements (High Schools Only)

– No Attachments –

5. School Calendar and Schedule

Empower's school calendar is designed to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of our students while providing ample time for professional development. The calendar includes 180 instructional days.

Key components of our school calendar are:

Staff Induction and Orientation (15 days): The staff induction and orientation program will provide opportunities for all staff members to work collaboratively to:

- Ground our work in the mission, vision, values, and beliefs of Empower Community School.
- Prepare and plan to implement individualized, differentiated instruction to support student academic growth.
- Prepare and plan to implement the comprehensive social and emotional development curriculum, including restorative practices.
- Review critical policies and procedures, including but not limited to finances, communications, and academic standards.

Instructional Day (180 days): Students will receive 7.5 hours of instruction daily, including core academics, physical education, electives, and social emotional learning. This equates to 1,350 instructional hours over the course of the school year, which equals an extra 24 days of instruction.

Professional Development and Data Analysis (7 days): Alabama's ESSA plan states, "Alabama believes in career development, the joy of learning for students, the thrill and devotion to their careers by teachers and school leaders"^[1]. In this spirit, Empower will have 7 full days for teachers to receive professional development on their individual and collective goals.

Each component of our academic calendar is designed to meet the needs of our students. Staff induction and orientation ensures that staff are ready to serve students the very minute they walk through our doors.

Students will arrive at 7:30 for breakfast. At 8:00, students will transition to community circle. The first academic class begins at 8:30 with dismissal at 4:00. Empower strives to increase proficiency by providing every student with extra time in reading and math to address prior learning gaps while accelerating learning. During our advisory and social emotional learning time, prepares students to have ownership of their learning and set appropriately challenging goals, which has a positive effect on student academic achievement.^[2]

The following chart displays the daily instructional minutes by subject:

Inclement Weather/Make-Up Days

In the event the school needs to make up days missed because of implement weather, Empower will designate professional development days as virtual learning days for students. Students will work from home while teachers receive professional development on campus.

^[1] Revised State Template for the Consolidated State Plan: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act. Submitted 12 October 17

[2] Hattie, John. Hattie Ranking: 252 Influences And Effect Sizes Related To Student Achievement, Retrieved from <https://visible-learning.org/hattie-ranking-influences-effect-sizes-learning-achievement/>. 10 October 2020.

Attachments

Section 5: School Calendar and Schedule

5.1	Attachment 7 - Daily and Weekly Schedule	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 12:47 PM	PDF / 98.02 KB
5.2	Attachment 6 - Full Year Calendar	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 12:47 PM	PDF / 136.095 KB

6. School Culture

Empower Community School influences change in our community by forging collaboration between a diverse group of scholars, educators, families, and partners to educate the next generation of community leaders and advocates. Our personalized approach to learning supports the academic, social, and emotional development of each scholar and prepares them to excel in every endeavor with the courage and ability to advocate for themselves and the community.

At the center of Empower's school culture plan is our belief that student social and emotional learning is paramount to academic success. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines social and emotional learning as "the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions".^[1] Empower's school culture embraces CASEL's 5 areas of competence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. This section of the application outlines the concepts and processes used to ensure a positive academic, social, and emotional culture at Empower and concludes with an illustration of how Empower's model is aligned with the CASEL framework and our dedicated SEL curriculum.

Empower believes that a positive, supportive, and reflective school culture is paramount to student, teacher, and leader growth. It is our goal for every stakeholder at Empower to be valued, respected, and challenged in a rigorous environment that supports academic, social, and emotional development. Empower's school culture plan represents a proactive approach to support our individual and collective school goals while our student discipline plan outlines the rules, regulations, and practices used to ensure a positive school culture for every stakeholder. Our school culture and everything we do at Empower is grounded in our core value and beliefs. Our E3 framework explains how these beliefs are exhibited in our daily practice.

Empowers E3 Framework

We believe in:

Excellence: Every student can learn and grow in rigorous academic settings with the appropriate support.

Empathy: Seeking to understand the backgrounds, differences, and aspirations of others, we operate with commitment to equitable understanding of and collaboration with all stakeholders, including educators, scholars, families, and the broader community.

Empowerment: Technology and innovation can be educational equalizers when used for personalized learning, content creation, and community connections.

Each component of Empower's School Culture Plan directly aligns with one of our beliefs and corresponding core values.

Key Components of Excellence

Positive Academic Environment

Empower community school firmly believes a positive academic environment is one where adults value students are prepared to teach them, learning is active and purposeful, and curriculum is challenging, exploratory, and relevant.^[2] With these tenets in mind, our academic model provides rigorous, relevant instruction in a student centered supportive environment.

The foundation of our learning environment is our innovative learning labs, which are large, open spaces where student learning is intentionally flexible to meet the needs of all learners. When you enter an Empower learning lab, you will see teachers facilitating direct instruction, students working together to complete complex learning tasks, and students working individually to solidify their learning. This unique space and model allow each student to work towards his or her individual goals while simultaneously receiving standards-based instruction.

Teachers will post daily learning targets with clear performance objectives. At the end of each class, students at Empower will be able to clearly articulate their progress towards the learning objective and the next step of the learning process. A critical component of increasing student academic achievement is teacher feedback for students.^[3] Teachers use feedback to praise student work, clear up misconceptions, and provide concrete next steps within the students' zone of proximal development.

Highly Organized, Aesthetically Pleasing Learning Environments

Empower classrooms will be highly organized with specific learning spaces to meet the diverse learning needs of students. Classrooms will be organized in centers, which allow space for teachers to provide responsive, small group instruction for students. Effective use of classroom centers also encourages a collaborative environment with every student and teacher working together to ensure the success of the entire class.^[4] When sectioned and organized neatly, center-based instruction is an effective method to educate students on the autism spectrum in inclusive classrooms.

Classrooms will have dedicated spaces to display student work samples and celebrate individual and collective student success. Students will have comfortable working spaces to collaborate with their peers and/or work on their individual. More importantly, the classroom environments will be flexible to meet student needs, including space for mentoring meetings, restorative sessions, and individual reflection.

Personalized Learning Plans (PLP)

Empower's school culture leverages the strengths of adolescent learners (independence,

creativity, and curiosity). During this age, students are at varying stages of their physical, social, and emotional development. The same is true for student academic and intellectual development. Our differentiated, individualized approach to learning recognizes scholars' differences and provides each scholar with a personalized learning plan (PLP) that clearly outlines academic, social, and emotional progress. The metrics and goals of each PLP directly aligns with our graduate profile.

Graduate Dispositions for Excellence

- Students will have mastered Pre-Algebra and/or Algebra I.
- Students will be able to explain and implement the 5Es (Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate) of scientific inquiry.
- Students will be able to express their thoughts using various methods of communication, including written and verbal communication. Students will be able to form their thoughts and opinions from a diverse group of sources.
- Students will be able to relate historical events to present times and articulate how past events have impacted communities locally, globally, nationally.

Key Components of Empathy

Community Circles

Daily community circles create an emotionally safe place for students and teachers to get to know each other, explore what they think and feel, and develop empathy skills. The concept of circle time is grounded in the idea that every person has worth and individuality. ^[5] Circle time will be used as a structured approach to problem solving in a space where all participants, both teacher and students, are equitably involved in the healing of the community. The equitable space for circle time will be guided by a set of agreed upon norms. Some examples of circle norms are ^[6]:

- One person talks at a time
- You can only talk when you have the talking stick
- Everyone listens when someone else is speaking
- Everyone has the right to speak or pass
- We can disagree with a statement but not put each other down
- There are no right or wrong answers

Although the process of community circles is not a punishment, circle time will be used as a strategy to address issues or concerns within a group or as a planned experience to build community, create new relationships, and enhance student social and emotional growth. Some examples of planned circle time prompts include ^[7]:

- I feel best when...
- When do I feel tempted to do something that I know is wrong?
- If I do not get my own way I feel...
- A special person in my life is.

The teacher serves as the facilitator of circle time. As an active participant of the circle, the teacher models the skills, attitudes, and behaviors while guiding the conversation for the group. In alignment with Empower's dedication to student independence and social emotional development, as students mature and adapt to the concept, practice, and spirit of circle time, they will then take ownership of the practice with the teacher being an active participant in the circle while a student facilitates.

Restorative Practices

“Restorative justice practices allow schools to create individualized solutions that are manageable for the offending students to fulfill, allow victims to receive closure, and repair the harm caused by the misbehavior.”^[8] By implementing restorative practices, we honor the individuality of every student and situation while focusing on how students can take responsibility of their mistakes to grow socially and emotionally while building trust in and relationships with others. Restorative practices are not a replacement for traditional discipline methods, such as suspension. Instead, they are tools used to allow students to take control of their actions and the impact that their behavior has on others. Additionally, students will have the opportunity to make the situation right with the individual or community that was impacted. It should be noted that restorative practices are not meant to be used in cases of bullying or harassment because these instances are indicative of the fact that the offender has already established a position of power, which makes it challenging to repair harm with a peer. Empower's restorative plan is guided by the following principles:

- Our words, actions, and behaviors are powerful
- The offended and offender are equally important
- How we make others feel is just as important as what we do
- We right our wrongs
- Every apology should come with a repairing action

Comprehensive Bullying Education and Prevention

Every student deserves a school environment free of bullying, harassment, and intimidation. The Jamari Terrell Williams Act of 2018 outlines the practices and policies schools must take to ensure that every claim of bullying, harassment, and intimidation is thoroughly investigated, and the appropriate follow up action is taken. It is imperative that students, teachers, and families understand what bullying is and work together to eliminate it in schools. According to the Center for Disease Control, the suicide rate for individuals between the ages of 10 and 24, increased almost 60% between 2007 and 2018. With the stakes so high, Empower will take an aggressive approach to prevent bullying at our school.

In the spirit of and in accordance with the Jamari Terrell Williams Act of 2018, Empower Community School will include bullying education in our daily circle time, employ restorative practices that focus on healing for the harmed and harmer, and actively teach all stakeholders what to do if they are a victim of or have witnessed bullying. In addition to circle time, students, faculty members, and parents will also serve on a joint committee to discuss bullying and, when necessary, make recommendations to the administration for improvement. We firmly believe schools are a place for equitable collaboration between educators, scholars, families, and the broader community, and welcome the input, advocacy, and action of all stakeholders to ensure that every Empower student is free of bullying, harassment, and intimidation.

Graduate Dispositions for Community

- Students will treat others with respect, seeking first to understand others before they are understood.
- Students will be comfortable communicating and collaborating with diverse stakeholders.
- Students will understand their own identity and emotions and how they impact and influence those around them.
- Students will be able to actively listen to others with the conversational skills and humility to know when to affirm or challenge individuals.

Key Components of Empowerment

Advisory and Goal Setting

At Empower, every student will have an adult advocate dedicated to supporting their academic, social, and emotional growth. Research shows that successful advisor-advisee programs promote small, caring communities of learners, individual attention to students, and mutually respectful and meaningful relationships.^[9] Advisors will meet weekly with their advisee to review the goals connected individualized learning plans, celebrate successes while acknowledging challenges, and develop next steps for growth.

Empower Community School plans to partner with Summit Learning to implement the advisory and goal setting program for grades 4-8. Currently being used to support over 80,000 students across 400 schools, Summit uses a research based approach to drive student engagement and build strong student-teacher relationships.^[10] The program uses a completely customizable, innovative platform to deliver content, host project based learning assignment, and create goals to support student academic, social, and emotional support. Teachers, students, and parents will collaborate with each other to set, track, and support the goals of each student. In grades K-3, advisory curriculum and resources will be developed from Summit's 4 domains of student success: cognitive skills, content knowledge, habits of success, and sense of purpose.

Student Led Conferences

Traditional school models use parent teacher conferences as a medium to communicate progress, challenges, or address issues related to student academic and/or social success. These conferences are typically adult led and occur both periodically (often quarterly) and when issues arrive. However, our student led conferences will provide an opportunity for the student to convey and communicate how they are progressing towards their chosen academic, social, and emotional goals. A strategy to promote student motivation, responsibility and achievement in all endeavors, the student led conferences provide an opportunity for students to discuss their learnings, identify which strategies work for them, and advocate for the supports they need from both their teachers and parents. This method of conferencing increases student responsibility and ownership of their learning.^[11] Students at every grade level will prepare for student led conferences with the support of their mentor using rubrics, guides, and probing questions to better understand and discuss their progress. These supports will be scaffolded for students who receive special services while students who have a home language other than English will be provided with translators to ensure the communication between the student, parent, and school is clear, concise, and actionable.

Counseling Services

Empower's school comprehensive school counseling program will be completely aligned to the American School Counselor Association's Professional Standards and Competencies, which outline the mindsets, behaviors, and rigorous programming to meet the needs of all K-12 students. Under the direction of the Director of Student Supports, our counselors will develop, implement, and assess a counseling program that addresses the needs of all students. The foundation of the counseling program are the mindsets school counselors hold about achievement and success. School counselors believe:

1. Every student can learn, and every student can succeed.
2. Every student should have access to and opportunity for a high-quality education.
3. Every student should graduate from high school prepared for postsecondary opportunities.
4. Every student should have access to a school counseling program.
5. Effective school counseling is a collaborative process involving school counselors, students, families, teachers, administrators, other school staff and education stakeholders.

6. School counselors are leaders in the school, district, state and nation.
7. School counseling programs promote and enhance student academic, career and social/emotional outcomes.

Empower Community School will implement an effective school counseling program that supports large group, classroom, small group, and individual development of positive mindsets and student advocacy with clear objectives to identify and inequities within the school setting, encourage the academic, social, and emotional development of each student, and ensure that students and families have access to the most appropriate and effective school and community resources available.

Graduate Dispositions for Empowerment

- Students will be able to lead within and outside of their school community, actively voicing both positive and negative options through an objective lens.
- Students will value the importance of education and become advocates for education for themselves and others.

Excellence, Empathy, and Empowerment in Action: A Day in the Life of an Empower Student: Daniel (6th Grader)

7:30: I arrive at school on the bus. It is a short ride from my house to the school. Once we get off the bus, I go to Ms. Smith's classroom. She is my homeroom teacher. Today, we are having French toast sticks and sausage for breakfast. I eat my breakfast and wash it down with orange juice and milk. I then put my things in my locker and prepare for morning meeting.

8:00 For morning meeting, we make a circle with our chairs. Jennifer, one of my classmates, reads the morning announcements, and Ms. Smith lets us know about the open house that is happening this weekend. She lets us know that she has sent all of our parents a message about it.

8:10 After morning meeting we start our community circle. Community circle is a good time to get to know my classmates and my teacher. Ms. Smith gives us the sentence starter, "I am happy when I get the chance to _____." She starts and tells us that she is happy when she gets the chance to see us learn new things. I am sitting to her right in the circle. So, I get speak next. I tell the class that I am happy when I finish my homework and get to ride my bike down to park with friends. After everyone goes, Ms. Smith tells us to remember our happy place if we get challenged today, and we all get ready for our first learning block.

8:30 We start our first learning block. There are three teachers in our learning lab. Ms. Smith, the social studies teacher, Mr. Ross, the English Teacher, and Ms. Jones, the special education teacher. All of the teachers are good, but Ms. Jones is my favorite. I am pretty good in English and social studies, but Ms. Jones helps me and a few other students when we do not understand our math. Today, we are continuing to read *The Watsons Go To Birmingham*, and we are studying how it relates to the Civil Rights Movement. By the end of the week, we would have completed essays on how the characters of the book understand the movement. The class begins with us going over our homework from last night. We had to identify the theme and setting of the book. After reviewing the homework, we take turns reading passages from the book, and Mr. Ross shows us how to annotate. Annotating is a way to take notes on a story. Sometimes Ms. Smith jumps in and tells us how what the author is saying relates to the movement. After reading, we practice annotating a passage on our tablets. I have learned how to highlight the text and write my thoughts beside it. I will use this information to complete my graphic organizer and essay letter. We then move into groups to complete our graphic organizer. I am in a group with 3 other students. The teachers come around the classroom to make sure we are doing what we are

supposed to and answer any questions we have. My group completes the graphic organizer, and Ms. Jones comes around to check it. She writes a smiley face on my paper, which means that I can move on to my independent work. The independent work is to begin my essay using the sentence starters given to us. I work on it for about 20 minutes, but do not finish. Ms. Jones checks my progress, lets me know I am on the right track and tells me to complete it for homework.

10:10 It's time for Power Hour. I like power hour because it gives me time to work on my growth areas. We have been talking in advisory about how we can use a growth mindset to learn things that we have not gotten yet. I am working on my math. Ms. Smith takes a group of 8 of us to review the homework from last night. We are working on factors. This is sometimes difficult for me because it takes me a while to remember my multiplication facts. We play a game where Ms. Smith quizzes us on multiplication facts while we work on finding the greatest common factor. Before we leave, Ms. Smith gives us a short quiz to see how much we learned today. It was a good day. I got 4 of the 5 problems correct.

11:00 It's time for lunch. Today, we have hamburgers, salad, and fruit. I am not a big fan of salad, but I love fruit. During lunch, my advisor, Mr. Jenkins, comes by to ask me how my day is going. He gives me a high five when I told him that I got 4 or the 5 problems correct.

11:30 After lunch, we pull out our tablets and log into Purpose Prep. Purpose Prep is an online program that teaches us how to be better people, friends, and students. Usually, we all work on the same lessons, but sometimes our teachers give us additional lessons to work on. Today, I am working on listening. There is a man in a video talking about how he likes listening to others. Afterwards, I answer questions to show what I have learned about listening skills.

12:00 At PE, we do our stretches to warm up and then play dodge ball. Dodgeball is fun, and Coach Johnson always makes sure that the game is fair and we play safe.

12:50 This is my favorite class of the day. We are using Ipads to learn to code. My team is working on programming a car to navigate through an obstacle course. This is a huge deal at our school. The team for each grade who has the fastest time will have their names on the sign outside the school. If we win, I am going to take a picture of it and post it on Snapchat.

1:40 We go back to the classrooms for our second learning block. This block is math and science, and the teachers are Mr. Craig, who teaches math, Ms. Evers, who teaches science, and Ms. Palmer. I like Ms. Palmer, she helps the math and science teachers with their classes. She comes to work at the school during the day and goes to college at night. She's always friendly and tells us about how she studies hard so she can be a teacher one day. We're studying about space in science and working on a group project to show how the planets rotate around the sun. My team is going to make a video where humans are planets and rotate around the sun. We'll probably enter it into the science fair too. In math, we're working on factors. The class is separated based on how much help we need from the teacher. I'm really good with talking. So, I'm narrating our video for the project. Once I'm done, Ms. Palmer helps me with my factors before Mr. Craig teaches my half of the class the new lesson. At the end of the new lesson, Mr. Craig gives us a short quiz. Once he checks it off, I put the quiz in my folder because I know that Ms. Jones will review it with me tomorrow.

3:20 I go to Mr. Jenkins for Advisory. Today is my day to meet one on one with Mr. Jenkins. While the other students work on their goals for the week, I meet with Mr. Jenkins to review what I have accomplished so far. We go over everything I have done, and he gives me a sheet to fill out for my conference with my mom next week. I have to list everything that I have done good and everything

I am working on. This is not just for my classes. It also talks about how I feel about myself and how I am getting along with others. Next week, we'll FaceTime my mom, and I'll get to explain to her the top things from my sheet.

3:40 We go back to homeroom for our circle time. This circle is different from the morning. Our class has had a good day today, and we tell each other everything that has gone well. I thank my teammates for being nice and listening while we were working on our science project, and Mr. Jenkins sent Ms. Smith a note telling her to share how much progress I've made in math. After circle time, we gather our stuff, and I head to the bus to go home.

Excellence, Empathy, and Empowerment in Action: A Day in the Life of an Empower Teacher (Mr. Craig – 6th Grade Math)

7:00 I arrive to the school, clock in, and go get a cup of coffee from the teacher lounge.

7:15 It is time for morning staff huddle. Every morning the staff gathers in the main hallway to prepare for the day. We talk about daily events, our instructional focus, and anything that may be happening in the community that may impact how our students show up at school. Morning huddle always ends with an inspirational message from a staff member. The message is designed to keep us grounded in our work. Today's message is a quote from Margaret Mead, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has".

7:30 My students start to trickle in. As they enter the school building, I give them a high five, and tell them "today is a great day to be great!" While they eat breakfast, I circle the room to check on them and ask them if there is anything special they need from me today.

8:00 The entire class circles up for morning meeting. I sit in the circle with the class because it is important that they understand that we are here together to support each other. This is something that all of the teachers at Empower model for students.

8:10 We begin circle time. Today's sentence starter is, "When I fail at something, I _____ to help me get back up." I start the circle by telling my students how I like to journal when I mess up. Journaling helps me think about what happened and what I could have done differently. I told the students that I often journal about lessons that I have taught them. The entire class shares before we get ready for the first learning block.

8:30 My first class of the day comes in. The thing I enjoy about Empower is the collaborative nature of the work. In our learning lab, we have 45 students. I co-teach this class with the science teacher, Ms. Evers, and we have an instructional aide, Ms. Palmer, that helps students as well. I start the day working with the 20 students who mastered yesterday's exit ticket. To ensure they are still on track, I give them a short 5 question entrance ticket that they can complete on their tablets. I get instant results from the quiz and can see that we need to review how to create a factor tree. After the review, I provide direct instruction to the group on factoring and provide another check for understanding. The students who have mastered it go on to work on their independent work while I provide small group instruction for the others. Once they are on track, they go on to their independent work, and the students who did not master the content come to me. Some of them have been working with Ms. Evers on their science projects while others have been reviewing the foundational concepts with Ms. Palmer. The process is the same for these students, and the class ends with every individual student knowing their next steps for power hour.

10:10 During power hour, I only have 15 students. We are working on foundation skills that were not mastered during previous grades. Today, we are playing a game to increase numerical fluency with multiplication facts. I know this skill is very important because students need it to be

successful in Algebra.

11:00 We have duty free lunch at Empower. Either an instructional aide or another staff member watches the students. Today's a special day for the students because Ms. Norman, the director of academics, is coming to eat lunch with them. They love when Ms. Norman comes because she always gives someone a shoutout during afternoon announcement.

11:30 After lunch, we have our daily SEL course via Purpose Prep. Today, we are talking about the power of reflection, which I introduced to students this morning. After a short video, we have a class discussion about reflection, and then students work through the reflection module. One great thing about the platform is that students who do not finish can work through the concepts on their own.

12:00 While students are at P.E. and Specials, we have one of three PLC meetings for the week. On the other days, we either plan next week's lessons or get feedback from our instructional coach. Today's meeting is a data analysis meeting. We are using the data from the NWEA Map assessment to create student intervention groups for Power Hour. We use the "Driven By Data" process to do this work. The process ensures that everyone has a role, we identify groups and individual students who need support, and we "keep the main thing the main thing", which is preparing for student academic, social, and emotional growth. The meeting lasts until 1:30, and I have the 30 minutes to rest and prepare for my next class.

1:40 I teach my second learning lab. The process is the same as the first period, but for this group I start with the students who did not master the content yesterday. After students return from P.E. and Specials, it is important that I help focus the students who have been identified as struggling.

3:20 After my last academic class, we have advisory. During advisory, I use the first 5 minutes to set the tone for the day and make sure that every student understands our daily goals. Afterwards, I have a 10 minute check in with one of my mentees to help them prepare for their student led conference next week. We review their individualized learning plan, goals, and progress. I then prompt the student to use the conference planning document to prepare. We will review these as a class next week before conferences begin.

3:40 My homeroom returns for our closing community circle. This is a time for celebration. Sometimes, I give the students a prompt to think about for the next day's morning community circle, but today, we are celebrating the progress students are making on their individualized learning plans. I shout out two students and prompt students to shout out anyone they have seen live up to our E3 model today.

4:00 I walk my students out the school for dismissal. As the bus pulls off, I wave goodbye and tell them I will see them in the morning.

The Empower Family: How Empower Community School Partners With Stakeholders From Day One

The success of Empower's comprehensive school culture plan rests on the active participation of all stakeholders in the process. Our school culture plan outlines how we will partner with students and families to ensure academic, social, and emotional success. The first major component of the school culture plan's success is ensuring that teachers and administrators are prepared to implement every part of the plan from day one. Beginning with our staff induction training and continuing throughout the year with professional development and coaching, Empower's

leadership team will work with teachers, both collectively and individually, to support implementation, paying special attention to the concepts that teachers and administrators have identified as areas of growth.

Parents and students will be introduced to the culture plan during our school orientation, which will be held in the summer before school opens. At orientation, families will be introduced to all aspects of the plan. Specifically, families and staff members will participate in community circles as a means to get to know one another, advisors will meet with advisees and families to determine initial goals and introduce the personalized learning plans, and staff members will model a restorative circle to introduce the concepts and processes of restorative discipline. In addition to these sessions, families will also receive information on the general expectations of the school.

Students and families who join the Empower community midyear will participate in a similar orientation. To ease transition and provide a peer group for new students, Empower will, whenever possible, work to enroll new students during natural transition points, such as the beginning of grading periods and/or semesters. This allows for the smooth transition of records from the students' previous schools and a fresh start as they become a part of the Empower family. Students who enter during the midyear will be assigned a peer mentor and provided with additional advisor-advisee meetings until they have fully transitioned. New students will shadow peer mentors to learn the beliefs and practices of the school culture model.

Our dedication to serve and meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of all students includes a clear mission to support students with special needs. Our personalized learning plans, Power Hour interventions, and advisory protocols ensure that all students receive the attention and services they need to grow academically, socially, and emotionally. Students receiving special education services will be placed in advisory based on need and areas of growth with students who would benefit from more intense or specific interventions being placed in smaller groups so they can receive the services they need. When necessary, Empower's student support team (with explicit parental input and permission) will partner with outside agencies to provide additional counseling for identified students. Additionally, the personalized learning plans of students who receive special needs will be living documents, mirroring the goals agreed upon via the IEP process.

At Empower, we value diversity, and students who are English Language Learners will be fully welcomed into the Empower community. ELL students will have individualized learning plans that mirror the goals set in their Individual Education Learning Plan (I-ELP). When necessary, students are provided a peer mentor to help them navigate the various aspects of Empower's school culture. Community Circles are a strong tool to enculturate students who are English Language Learners. Twice a day, students will be able to bond with other students and teachers and share their beliefs, thoughts, and experience. This can be incredibly valuable for students who can communicate socially but have not mastered academic language. Translation assistance will be provided for all orientations, meetings, and conferences.

Empower's assessment, response to intervention, and data analysis systems work together to identify students who are in risk of academic failure. Our personalized learning model is designed to identify academic, social, and emotional barriers to student academic success. Through advisory, response to intervention, and our problem solving team, students at risk of academic failure will be provided additional academic support during Power Hour. This support is dedicated to addressing prior learning gaps that are keeping the student mastering grade level standards. advisory provides a space for students to use metacognitive strategies to take ownership of their learning and create plans for success while community circles allow students to see how teachers and peers approach the challenges they face. Ultimately, Empower Community School is prepared to meet every student where they are at and do whatever it takes to support their academic, social, and emotional growth.

Bringing It All Together: The Explicit Connection Between E3, CASEL, and Purpose Prep

Empower's E3 Framework connects seamlessly to the CASEL Competencies and Purpose Prep Modules. The chart below articulates this connection:

[1] Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (2020) "CASEL'S SEL FRAMEWORK: What Are the Core Competence Areas and Where Are They Promoted?". Retrieved from www.casel.org

[2] Association for Middle Level Education. This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents. 2017

[3] Hattie, John. Hattie Ranking: 252 Influences And Effect Sizes Related To Student Achievement, Retrieved from <https://visible-learning.org/hattie-ranking-influences-effect-sizes-learning-achievement/>. 10 October 2020.

[4] R. SOLESTE HILBERG; JI-MEI CHANG; GEORGIA EPALOOSE. DESIGNING EFFECTIVE ACTIVITY CENTERS FOR DIVERSE LEARNERS. CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON EDUCATION, DIVERSITY & EXCELLENCE 2003

[5] Tew, M., (1998), 'Circle time: A much neglected resource in secondary schools?', *Pastoral Care*, NAPCE, 18-27.

[6] Kent County Council. Circle Time: A Whole School Approach

[7] Kent County Council. Circle Time: A Whole School Approach

[8] Payne, A. A., & Welch, K. (2015). Restorative justice in schools: The influence of race on restorative discipline. *Youth & Society*, 47(4), 539-564.

[9] Miglin, K., Stephens, B., Hurd, E., & Al-Bataineh, A. T. (2015). Middle school advisory: Students' perceptions of its effectiveness. *International Journal of Learning and Teaching*, 01-14.

[10] Summit Learning. *The Science of Summit*. 2020. Retrieved from www.summitlearning.org

[11] West, K. L. (2017). *Teacher perceptions and benefits of student-led conferencing in southern and central illinois elementary schools* (Order No. 10599402). Available from ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global; Social Science Premium Collection. (1936333517). Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/dissertations-theses/teacher-perceptions-b>

Attachments

Section 6: School Culture

– No Attachments –

7. Supplemental Programming

Educating the Whole Child: Empower’s Plan to Support Student Mental, Emotional, and Social Development and Health

At the core of Empower’s supplemental programming is our dedication to the mental, social, and emotional health of all our students. Community circles are a time for students to connect with each other while processing their individual thoughts and emotions while advisory provides each student with a dedicated adult advocate. The school will also employ a social worker to connect students with additional resources when needed. At the core of our programs to support student mental, emotional, and social development and health is our daily SEL program via Purpose Prep. Purpose Prep is Edgenuity’s blended platform for social and emotional learning. Completely, aligned to all five Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) competencies, statistics^[1] collected on the program’s usage have shown the program to be effective in the following ways:

- 106% increase in knowing how to cope with stress
- 56% increase in knowing how to handle a crisis, hardship or difficulty
- 65% increase in knowing how to cope with depression
- 50% reduction in disruptive and noncompliant behavior
- 40% increase in knowledge on how to improve a situation with a toxic/unhealthy relationship

The Purpose Prep curriculum and platform are aligned with Empower’s individualized learning model, including detailed support for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Response to Instruction (RTI). Teachers can assign individual students lessons and strategies based on their needs while also teaching classroom and schoolwide behaviors expectations. Advance data analysis and student, class, and school level reports provide teachers and school leadership with the information needed to monitor and assess growth and plan for future supports.

Purpose Prep’s model is based on the Theory Classifications of Emotions. As students progress through the curriculum, they learn about specific emotions and how to process them. The model includes:

- Grades K-5: Inner Circle: Basic Emotions and Feelings
- Grades 6-8: Middle Circle: Advanced Emotions and Feelings
- Grades 9-12: Outside Circle: Complex Emotions and Feelings

The graphic below illustrates the emotions and feelings for each grade band:

Co-Curricular Programming

Empower does not intend to offer summer school, and the school will partner with other local organizations, such as the parks and recreation board and YMCA to ensure students have access to extracurricular activities. The school is currently in the process of identifying partners to apply for a grant to operate a 21st Century Community Learning Center. “The 21st Century Community Learning Program Center (CCLC) is a U.S. Department of Education program, administered through the states, providing grants to schools, community and faith-based organizations, and youth development agencies, to provide high quality, expanded learning opportunities outside of regular school hours for children in a safe and secure educational environment.”^[1] Empower’s 21st Century Community Learning Program will be used to provide after school and summer enrichment programming in reading, math, and fine arts.

Financing Supplemental Programming

As part of our core model, Empower budget has dedicated funding for instructional materials and digital content. This funding will be used to purchase the Purpose Prep Curriculum for students and staff. In the case that Empower is not awarded a 21st Century Community Learning Program, we have set aside \$100,000 for Other Instructional Support Costs to support the afterschool and summer programming.

[1] Alabama 21st Century Community Learning Centers. 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.alabama21cclc.org/>

[1] Edgenuity and Purpose Prep. Prepared for the Alabama State Department of Education. 2020

Attachments

Section 7: Supplemental Programming

– No Attachments –

8. Special Populations and At-Risk Students

Meeting the Needs of All Students: Empower’s Comprehensive Student Support Model

Empower Community School believes all students can grow academically, socially, and emotionally when provided with the appropriate support. It is through this belief that we execute our plan to serve special population and at risk students. At minimum, we will comply with all federal and state guidelines, regulations, and laws, including the Individual with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act but believe that our programming far surpasses those levels of support. According to the 2020 ALSDE District Report Card Data, 11.81% of students in Bessemer City Schools have been identified as students with disabilities, and 7.14% of students were identified as being English Language Learners. Given the unique nature of these student groups and the potential attractiveness of our school model. Empower is expecting to serve a population consisting of 15% students with disabilities and 10% English Language Learners. According to the National Associate for Gifted Children (NAGC, 2020), roughly 8% of students in Alabama have been identified as gifted. With this in mind, Empower is planning to serve a gifted population of 10% of our students. Our daily schedule, including advisory, Power Hour Interventions, and personalized learning, combined with our staffing model provide ample support for the unique needs of special population students.

Empower’s plan to serve students with special needs begins with our enrollment process. During the enrollment process, our school will request all records (academic, testing, IEPs, discipline, etc.) from the student’s previous school, parents will fill out a home language survey, and the information ascertained from these processes will be used to initiate the plan to meet the needs of each individual students. Because we understand that we may experience delays in receiving records from other schools, Empower’s director of student support will oversee the process of identifying any special needs of students, including searching the state student information system (PowerSchool) for identification, collaborating with advisors to interview parents and students to learn about the services received at their previous school, and conducting baseline assessments in reading and math for all students.

If a student has been identified as having a current Individualized Education Plan (IEP), 504 Plan, English Language Plan (I-ELP), or Gifted Education Plan (GEP), the Coordinator of Student Support will expeditiously coordinate with staff members to schedule an initial meeting with the student's guardians to discuss the current plan, determine what, if any, adjustments need to be made, and, if necessary, revise the plan.

Empower's staffing plan includes a robust plan to serve students with special needs. The responsibility to ensure that each student is receiving the services they need to be successful ultimately falls on the Executive Director/Head of School. The Coordinator of Student Support is responsible for the administration and implementation of all special programming. This role is supported by school counselors, special education teachers, English Language Learner teachers, Reading Specialists, Math Specialists, Behavior Interventionists, and Instructional Aides. The staffing structure outlined in our financial plan includes enough full-time staff members to support our special education, English Language Learners, and gifted students. In the case more students receiving special services are enrolled or identified than we have currently projected, the school will adjust its staffing model to meet the needs of the students. Empower is dedicated to ensuring that the right adults are in place to serve every one of our students. Our staff will implore a variety of strategies to ensure student needs are met including, but not limited to:

- Making instructions, choices, and scheduling as simple as possible
- Establishing clear learning expectations
- Establishing clear behavioral expectations
- Provide follow-up directions
- Offering graphic organizers for academic content
- Reviewing previous learning and lessons
- Using audiovisual tools
- Consistently assess student learning and behavior
- Use movement activities
- Provide an easily accessible daily and weekly student schedule

(National Association of Special Education Teachers, 2020)

These strategies will work to create the consistency and support needed to meet all students where they are at, assist students with staying on task, and allow teachers to plan, support, and adjust instruction to meet the needs of our diverse learners. Particularly, offering choice encourages students to take ownership of their own learning while graphic organizers provide context for students to chunk their learning into manageable steps while teachers scaffold instruction.

Response to Intervention and the Problem Solving Team: A Framework for Student Support

At the core of Empower's support for all students in Response to Instruction (RTI). Completely aligned to our personalized learning program. "RTI integrates core instruction, assessment, and intervention within a multi-tiered system to maximize student achievement and reduce behavior problems. Through implementation of RTI, schools identify and monitor students at risk, use problem-solving and data-based decision making to provide research-based interventions and adjust the intensity of interventions based on the student's response." (ALSDE, 2009)

As part of our school RTI practice, Empower will use a diverse set of data sources to identify students who are performing below grade level, including, but not limited to:

- Cumulative Student Files: Cumulative files include enrollment, attendance, and performance

data. For instance, an incoming 6th grade student who has been in Alabama public schools would have a file with attendance information and multiple testing sources, including Scantron Performance Series and Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program (ACAP) scores. The included score reports would tell us where students last performed academically and articulate which previous learning standards they have not mastered.

- Universal Screening: Every student in grades K-2 will be screened using DIBELS 8th Editions, which assesses foundational literacy skills. The assessment screens for the following subskills:
 - Grade K: "phonological awareness including phoneme segmentation, blending, onset and rime; rapid automatic naming including letter naming fluency; letter sound association; and phonological memory, including non-word repetition"
 - Grade 1: "phoneme awareness, specifically phoneme segmentation, blending, and manipulation tasks; letter naming fluency; letter sound association; phonological memory, including nonword repetition; oral vocabulary; and word recognition fluency...oral reading fluency."
 - Grade 2: "word identification (real and nonsense), oral reading fluency, and reading comprehension"
- NWEA Map Assessments: Students will take the NWEA Map Growth Test 3 times a year (Orientation, Winter, and Spring). The results from the assessment will allow teachers to create individual learning plans for all students. More importantly, the NWEA Map identifies current student performance levels, and reports can be used to create action plans within the students' zone of proximal development. The test reporting identifies skills for reinforcement, advancement, and acceleration, and are a critical component of building each students' individual learning plans.
- Classroom Assessments: Teachers will use both formative and summative assessments to check student learning. Results from summative assessment will be included in the individualized learning plan for each student. Teachers will use formative assessment results to track student progress and provide feedback about student success to students and parents.

The RTI Practice consists of three tiers of student support for academics and behavior: Tier I: Researched-Based Core Instruction, Tier II: Targeted Interventions, and Tier III: Intensive Interventions. Each tier has a set of concrete practices and processes the school will use to successfully identify and support students who are not performing on grade level.

During the RTI process, the first sign of a student not performing on grade level is when a student is unsuccessful during Tier 1: Researched-Based Instruction. During tier 1, teachers provide all students opportunities to practice and review standards aligned instruction and increases time on task. Empower's instructional model ensure that students have ample opportunities for time on task. More importantly, our elementary station model and middle grades collaborative learning environments provide opportunities for flexible grouping, differentiated instruction, reteaching and practice. During tier 1 instruction, teachers will provide standards based assessments to determine which students need to move to tier II instructional support.

Tier 2: Targeted Interventions are designed for students who are not making progress during tier I core instruction. Designed to remediate student skill and concept deficits, tier II instruction provides additional opportunities for student to practice and review concepts while receiving feedback from their teachers. At Empower, special education teachers, core academic teachers, and instructional aides will implement tier II instruction and monitor for improvements. Tier II instruction will take place during core instruction as well as Power Hour. The level of tier II support will be determined based on student need and progress.

Tier 3: Intensive Interventions are designed for students who have not fully responded

academically to Tier I and Tier II intervention. Tier III interventions will be provided using evidenced based interventions, which will be facilitated by reading and math specialists. Provided as a pull out intervention during Power Hour, tier 3 interventions will be selected based on their effectiveness with similar student populations. To assess program effectiveness, Empower's leadership team will use program reviews from the U.S. Department of Education's *What Works Clearinghouse* or EdReports.org.

Empower will use the problem solving team (PST) approach to identify students in need of support and monitor student progress. After a universal screening, the grade level PST Team, consisting of teachers and other members of the student support team, meets to identify any students in need of additional support. During the initial meeting, the team uses the data from the universal screening to set measurable outcomes for individual students and assign students to support tiers. The PST process looks to answer 4 questions for each individual student:

- What is the problem?
- Why is the problem happening?
- How are we going to solve the problem?
- Did the intervention work?

The data and results from the PST process are communicated to the student's advisor, who then collaborates with the student and their guardian to further develop the students individualized education plan. Students who do not respond successfully to Tier III instruction will be referred for special education services. The illustration below shows how the RTI process supports student growth and connects to the special education referral process.

Figure 1: From Response to Instruction: Alabama Core Support for All Students

The Special Education Referral Process and Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE)

Childfind is the requirement for local educational agencies to identify students who may be eligible for special education services. Students may qualify for special education services in one of the following areas:

- Autism
- Deaf/Blindness
- Developmental Delay
- Emotional Disability
- Hearing Impairment
- Intellectual Disability
- Multiple Disabilities
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Other Health Impairment
- Specific Learning Disabilities
- Speech or Language Impairment
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Visual Impairment

The Alabama Administrative Code (290-8-9) outlines the state departments rules concerning special education services. Empower community school will comply with all federal, state, and local regulations pertaining to this subject. A student can be referred for special education services by a number of stakeholders including teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents.

Parents will be able to make verbal requests for an initial evaluation. If a parent makes a verbal request for an evaluation, a member of Empower's Student Success Team will obtain information from that parent and complete a written referral. There will be no limit on the number of referrals per year or time of year the school will accept referrals.

Once a request for referral is received, Empower staff will provide the parent with a completed Notice and Invitation to a Meeting/Consent for Agency Participation form. The invitation will be for the parent to meet with the IEP Team Consisting of the following members with the following responsibilities:

Parent: The legal parent/guardian of the student.

Regular Education Teacher: The regular education teacher must participate in the development, review, and revision of the student's IEP.

Special Education Teacher: The special education teacher should be the teacher who provides services for the student.

LEA Representative: The LEA representative must be qualified to provide or supervise any specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities, be knowledgeable about the general education curriculum and resources available within the school, and have the authority to commit resources when necessary.

An individual who can interpret the instruction implications of evaluation results: This individual will be responsible for explaining the evaluation results to the IEP team.

Student: When developmentally appropriate, the student should be included as a member of the IEP team.

Other Individuals: At the request of the LEA or parent, other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the student should be included on the IEP team. Knowledge or expertise is determined by the entity (LEA or parent) initiating the request.

The IEP team will meet initially to review relevant information, including assessment results, progress monitoring (PST) documentation, and concerns of the parents, teachers, student, and other members of the team. If the IEP determines that an evaluation is necessary, the parent must provide written consent for an evaluation to occur. If the parent refuses to provide consent for an evaluation, the IEP has the following options:

- The IEP Team may request that the parent participate in a conference to discuss his/her decision.
- The public agency may ask for mediation from the ALSDE.
- The public agency may initiate a due process hearing to have an impartial hearing officer to order an initial evaluation to be conducted over the parent's objections.
- The public agency may decide to accept the parent's refusal.

If it is determined that an evaluation is not necessary, the student will be referred to the school's problem solving team.

If the parent signs the evaluation for consent, the special education teacher will conduct the initial evaluation within 60 days. Within 30 days of completing the evaluation, the IEP team will reconvene to determine eligibility. If the student is determined to be eligible, within 30 days, the IEP team will convene to develop the IEP, which must provide a Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE) in accordance with all federal and state regulations.

After reviewing the IEP, the parent has the option to provide consent for or refuse services. If the parent provides consent, special education services will begin in accordance with the student's IEP. If the parent refuses services, the IEP process is over, and the student will be referred to the school's problem solving team.

(ALSDE, Office of Student Learning, Special Education Services, 2019)

Educating Students in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

In accordance with Section 290-8-9-.06 of the Alabama Administrative Code, Empower Community Schools will provide qualified students with special education services in their least restrictive environment (LRE). Every student qualifying for special education services will have his or her LRE determined on a case-by-base basis during the development of their IEP. At Empower, students with disabilities will be educated with their peers without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate and not removed for the general education classrooms unless they are not progressing with the support of supplementary aids and services. Some examples of supplementary aids and services Empower staff will implement to support student growth in the general education setting are:

- Preferential seating in the classroom and other locations
- One-on-one support provided by a special education or general education teacher in an including classroom
- Intentional planning between the general and special education teachers
- Alternate presentation of materials (recorded classes, audio books, etc.)
- Explicit instruction in time management and organizational skills
- Access to communicative software
- Small group instruction from the general education or special education teachers
- Testing adaptations, such as having the test read aloud or presented in modified formats

(IRIS Center, 2019)

Empower's individualized approach to learning supports students receiving special education services towards meeting their annual progress goal. In addition to the special education teacher/case manager and any consultative services students receive, the student's general education teachers and advisors will be active participants in the special education programming.

Progress Monitoring

Student annual progress goals will be determined by the IEP team during the annual IEP meeting. Special education teachers will complete progress monitoring for students at the end of each grading period. If a student is not progressing towards their annual goals, the IEP team will convene to review the IEP, review current data, discuss student progress, and if necessary, update the IEP, including supplementary aids and services. Although progress monitoring will be completed at the end of each grading period, IEP teams will have the opportunity to convene to review the IEP anytime concerns or questions regarding student progress occur. Additionally, the Coordinator of Student Support will collaborate with special education teachers to review aggregate progress monitoring data, paying special attention to identify any gaps existing between subgroups.

Promoting Equity: Addressing Disproportionality in Special Education Services

Empower Community School is dedicated to ensuring equity in all aspects of our academic program. Disproportionality occurs when students of a specific group are over or

underrepresented in a specific category. In special education services, particular attention will be paid to groups who are over represented in high incidence disabilities or under represented in gifted and talented programs. Empower Community School will employ the following strategies to prevent over or under representation of students being identified as requiring special education services:

- Train all instructional staff on disproportionality and Lee vs. Macon
- Quarterly academic, behavior, and attendance data reviews with particular attention to student subgroups
- Comprehensive review and data analysis for students referred to the PST team
- Comprehensive review and data analysis for students referred for special education services, including gifted and talented services.

If it is found that discrepancies between subgroups exist, Empower Community School will hire professional development consultants to provide support for school leaders and staff members. Additionally, the school's problem solving team process, procedures, and supports will undergo a complete review to ensure all students are being provided with an equitable learning experience.

Special Education Records Maintenance

Maintaining accurate records is a critical component of an effective special education program. The Coordinator for Student Support is responsible for training staff on the requirements of record maintenance. All staff members will receive training on confidentiality, HIPPA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act), and FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act). Student records, including academic records, evaluations, and IEPs are protected under these laws and will be held confidential. All official records (those with signatures) will be held under lock and key in the school's vault. Only the registrars, Coordinator of Student Support, and Directors of Academics will have access to the vault. Teachers will be able to access appropriate student records through the student information system.

Support for English Language Learners

Empower Community School values diversity and intends to serve students from a variety of backgrounds, including those who are identified as English Language Learners (ELL). The coordinator of student support will supervise the ELL teacher and ensure collaboration between the ELL teacher, general education teachers, and other staff. Empower's staffing model includes funding for EL teachers and instructional aids to support the schools EL program.

Upon enrolling at Empower, every family will complete a Home Language Survey. If a student's home language is anything other than English, students will take the WIDA-ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT). The test is designed to identify students who may be candidates for ELL and/or bilingual services and determine the academic ELL proficiency of students new to the country or school.

The next step in the process is for the EL committee, consisting of core teachers, EL teacher, counselors, and others knowledgeable about the student, to meet to determine eligibility. The committee will review the W-APT scores, grades, attendance, and previous attendance of the student. Students who are identified as EL learners will be placed in the core program, and parents will be notified in writing in their language of choice within 30 days for consent.

Once parent consent is granted, the EL committee will meet to develop the students English Learn Plan (ELP). The committee will be responsible for:

- recommending and monitoring student participation in the EL program

- monitoring the academic progress of EL students in the regular program
- provide recommendations to core teachers for EL accommodations
- determine if an EL student will participate in the statewide testing program
- reclassifying EL students as they gain proficiency in English

ACCESS 2.0

Students who are in the EL program will annually take the ACCESS 2.0 exam. The exam tests students in four distinct language domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Each domain is represented by a proficiency level ranging from 1 to 6. The chart below outlines the levels:

Level 1	Entering
Level 2	Emerging
Level 3	Developing
Level 4	Expanding
Level 5	Bridging
Level 6	Reaching

The ACCESS 2.0 assessment provides each student with a proficiency level. The EL committee will continually review student ACCESS scores to assess how students are progressing through the EL program and determine appropriate instructional supports for individual students. Once students have reached a proficiency level of 5.8, they will exit the EL program and no longer be eligible for services

Including ELL Students in the Classroom

At Empower, teachers will intentionally plan and assess to meet the learning needs of ELL students. Below are some selected strategies used to support student language acquisition and academic growth:

- **Previewing Text:** Students will be given the opportunity to look through a text to identify pictures or headings that can provide context.
- **Summarizing and Retelling:** After completing a text, students will have the opportunity to put the text in their own words and make personal connections.
- **Buddy Reading/Think, Pair, Share:** Students will be provided with a buddy to thinking about a questions, discuss it with their buddy, and then share with the larger group.

- Explicit Vocabulary Instruction: Teachers will use word walls, word sorts, and concepts maps to teach vocabulary
- Metacognitive Strategies: Teachers will support student use of metacognitive strategies to monitor, assess, and organize learning.
- Graphic Organizers: Graphic organizers will be used to help students connect learning concepts.

Identifying and Meeting the Needs of Highly Capable Students: Empower’s Gifted Services Program

Empower embraces the opportunity to serve a diverse student population, including students who have been identified as gifted and talented. “According to the Alabama Administrative Code (AAC), “Intellectually gifted children and youth are those who perform or who have demonstrated the potential to perform at high levels in academic or creative fields when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth require services not ordinarily provided by the regular school program. Children and youth possessing these abilities can be found in all populations, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor.” Creativity, in this definition, refers to problem-solving abilities.” (ALSDE, 2020)

Through the Childfind process, Empower will screen all second grade students to determine those identified as gifted. Teachers will screen all students in the second grade using the ALSDE’s screening guide, which includes checklists of behaviors that can be identified as gifted. Teachers will screen every student and note the behavior of each student in every gifted domain. The teachers will forward the results to the Coordinator of Students Supports and school gifted services referral team, who will contact the parents for consent, determine eligibility, and complete the Gifted Education Plan (GEP) for each student. In addition to the Childfind process, parents, teachers, and administrators can also refer students to the gifted services referral team for evaluation. Student determined eligible will receive services in the following settings.

Grades K-2—Student will receive accommodations in the general education setting. The general education teacher should be knowledgeable of gifted learners, trained in differentiation, and demonstrate a willingness to address the needs of diverse learners.

Grades 3-5—Students will receive pullout services for 3-5 hours a week.

Grades 6-8—Students will participate in enrichment clusters during Power Hour and/or advanced classes.

Annually, student gifted education plans will be revised to outline services and goals for each individual student. Students and parents are a critical part of the gifted education process. At Empower, we will ensure that every students’ GEP meets their unique needs. This is especially important for students who are identified as twice exceptional, meaning they identify as gifted while also receiving special education services. In this instance, it is critical for the special education, general education, and gifted teachers to collaborate with parents and students to ensure the appropriate program is implemented.

Empower’s dedication to personalized learning for all students is rooted in our belief that all students can grow academically, socially, and emotionally when provided appropriate support. Our comprehensive special services program addresses the needs of special education, English Language Learners, at-risk, and gifted students.

Attachments

Section 8: Special Populations and At-Risk Students

– No Attachments –

9. Unique/Innovative Program Offering

Education from the Inside Out: Empower’s Commitment to Social and Emotional Learning

Student social and emotional development are paramount to Empower’s mission and vision. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines social and emotional learning as “the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions”.^[1] Empower’s school culture embraces CASEL’s 5 areas of competence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. This section of the application outlines the concepts and processes used to ensure a positive academic, social, and emotional culture at Empower and concludes with an illustration of how Empower’s model is aligned with the CASEL framework and our dedicated SEL curriculum.

Contrary to the local school system and traditional school model, Empower’s SEL program, which includes, Community Circles, dedicated time for social and emotional learning, and restorative practices, are designed to allow students to develop social and emotional skills and take responsibility for their own success. A 2016 study^[2] examining circle time and restorative practices lists the following positive benefits for students:

1. Ownership of the process/bypassing adults
2. Interrupting the school-to-prison pipeline
3. Improved relationships
4. Less destructive conflict
5. Meaningful dialogue
6. Academic and social achievements

Personalized Learning’s Connection to ALSDE Initiatives

Empower’s personalized learning model is designed to ensure every student has the supports needed to excel academically, socially, and emotionally and aligns with the state’s key academic initiatives in reading, math, and science.

“The Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) is a statewide K-12 initiative committed to supporting the development of high-quality instruction that will prepare all students with the literacy skills needed to meet or exceed grade-level standards.”^[3]

“The Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative, commonly referred to as AMSTI, is the Alabama Department of Education’s initiative to improve STEM teaching statewide, including improvements in the individual, as well as the integrated, STEM subjects. Its mission is to support Alabama educators and students in learning STEM through doing STEM.”^[4]

Empower’s learning model incorporates additional time in reading and math, project-based

instruction, and opportunities for students to engage in technology in all academic subjects. Additionally, both initiatives focus on teacher professional development. Empower’s comprehensive professional development program prepares teachers to deliver high-quality instruction. In the middle grades, Empower’s unique classroom model allows math and science teachers to work collaboratively while teaching the STEM subjects. Both ARI and AMSTI provide additional coaching for teachers. ARI and AMSTI support personnel will work collaborative with Empower’s school leadership team to develop coaching and development plans for teachers.

[1] Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (2020) “CASEL’S SEL FRAMEWORK: What Are the Core Competence Areas and Where Are They Promoted?”. Retrieved from www.casel.org

[2] Lyubansky, Mikhail; Ortega, Lilyana; Espelage, Dorothy; Nettles, Sandra. Outcomes of a Restorative Circles Program in a High School Setting. *Psychology of Violence*. 2016

[3] Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI). 2020

[4] Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI). 2020

Attachments

Section 9: Unique/Innovative Program Offering

– No Attachments –

10. Student Recruitment and Enrollment

Empowerment for All: A Comprehensive Plan for Open-Enrollment[1]

Bessemer, AL is a diverse community with various groups of stakeholders. Empower Community school will employ a robust recruiting and enrollment plan to ensure fair access to all families interested in enrolling in the school. The school will enroll students without regard to race, color, religion or creed, national origin, sex, citizenship, or physical or mental disability. Attachment 8 is our school’s Enrollment Policy, including a detailed plan for student engagement and enrollment.

Pre-Enrollment Activities

Upon approval of a charter, Empower Community School will continue to engage with Bessemer families to increase interest in our unique educational program.

Visual Advertising: The school has already secured billboard advertising space at 9th Avenue (also known as Bessemer Super Highway), which is a main throughway in Bessemer. Located less than a mile from the proposed elementary school location (2400 7th Ave North), the location receives over 82,000 impressions weekly. The billboard will allow families to connect via the school’s website and or text message.

Digital Advertising: Empower continually informs the community about recruitment, enrollment, and engagements event via social media, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Materials will be posted in both English and Spanish to ensure that families whose second language is English receive up to date information about the school.

Print Advertising: Empower will also use print advertisements to communicate with families, including flyers, posters, and handouts situated, with appropriate permission, at local businesses. To date, Empower's community engagement team has identified and connected with over 40 early childhood development centers to inform parents about the school and enrollment procedures.

Community Information Sessions: To date, Empower has hosted 5 Virtual Community Information Sessions to inform members of the community about the school and receive feedback on the school model. This process will continue upon approval, and the school is prepared to offer continuous community sessions once opened.

Physical Activities: Empower's community support team will canvas the Bessemer community to have face to face interactions with potential parents and students. These activities include presenting at local events of other community organizations, canvassing youth athletic events, and presenting to the faith community whenever possible.

Meeting the Needs of All: Empower's Plan to Engage All Learners

Empower is dedicated to serving all students. To ensure that we are reaching students who have been traditionally academically or economically disadvantaged or are at risk of failure, Empower plans to use a multi-faceted approach to recruiting, including:

- Partnering with local organizations, such as the Housing Authority to host recruitment events
- Distributing materials and hosting information sessions with parents of students with unique needs with intentionality around explaining how our personalized approach to learning and accompany support meet the needs of all learners
- Employing a simple, but effective pre-enrollment system. Parents will be able to sign their student up via our website or text messaging. Paper copies of enrollment forms will also be available at the school or via mail.

Empower's Lottery System

If more students apply to Empower than there are seats available, Empower will incorporate a randomized lottery system for student enrollment. To register for the lottery, parents will only have to provide their contact information, address, and student age/grade level. All other information, including residency verification, will be collected post lottery. Additionally, attendance at the lottery is not a requirement for enrollment. The school's lottery process and applicable enrollment preferences are included in Attachment 8. In the spirit of our school's mission and vision to serve a diverse group of learners, Empower will work to ensure family status or situation is not a barrier to enrollment.

Attachments

Section 10: Student Recruitment and Enrollment

10.1	Attachment 8a-Secured Billboard Contract	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 1:05 PM	PDF / 88.898 KB
10.2	Attachment 8-Enrollment Policy	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 1:02 PM	PDF / 131.07 KB

11. Student Discipline Policy and Plan

Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS): Setting the Tone for a Positive School Culture

Empower’s discipline model is designed to set boundaries for how we interact as a community while creating pathways for student personal growth. Our school-wide Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) model is designed to establish a positive social culture and behavioral supports needed for all children. “Students who are unable to behave appropriately and follow school rules are unable to learn. Worse, these students may distract their peers and their teachers, decreasing the value of the classroom as a whole. Improving student behavior has been shown to improve academic performance.”^[1] Additionally, Empower’s leadership team has learned through experience that exclusionary disciplinary measures without appropriate support and interventions can compound to become more serious and dangerous. With these understanding of research, experience, and practice, our school will use PBIS as the backbone of our student discipline model. Similar to our Response to Instruction Program, PBIS uses a tiered approach to for student behavioral expectations. During our pre-opening phase, leadership team members, teachers, students, and parent focus groups will meet collaboratively to create our PBIS framework, including appropriate student rewards. This is designed to create buy-in and ownership from all stakeholders. The PBIS framework will be in full alignment with Empower’s Code of Conduct. Below are the tiers^[2] for PBIS support.

	Essential Elements
Tier 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavioral Expectations Defined • Behavioral Expectations Taught • Reward system for appropriate behavior • Clearly defined consequences for problem behavior • Differentiated instruction for behavior • Continuous collection and use of data for decision making • Universal screening for behavior support
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress monitoring for at risk students • System for increasing structure and predictability • System for increasing contingent adult feedback

<p>Tier 2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System for linking academic and behavioral performance • System for increasing home/school communication • Collection and use of data for decision-making • Basic-level function-based support
<p>Tier 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional Behavioral Assessment (full, complex) • Team-based comprehensive assessment • Linking of academic and behavior supports • Individualized intervention based on assessment information focusing on (a) prevention of problem contexts, (b) instruction on functionally equivalent skills, and instruction on desired performance skills, (c) strategies for placing problem behavior on extinction, (d) strategies for enhancing contingency reward of desired behavior, and € use of negative or safety consequences if needed. • Collection and use of data for decision-making

Empower will use PBIS Rewards to implement our PBIS System. PBIS Rewards is an interactive platform that allows teachers and staff to reward students points for meeting or exceeding our behavioral expectations. Students can receive positive points for displaying one of Empower’s 3Es: excellence, empathy, or empowerment. When a staff member sees a student excelling in one of the 3Es, they will scan the students ID badge and add positive points to the student’s profile.

Alternatively, students who are not meeting expectations can receive negative points. Over the course of any period of time, students, teachers, and parents can track a student progress to determine areas of success and growth. More importantly, the interactive system allows students to monitor their own progress and self-regulate their emotions. In addition to our dedicated social and emotional learning via Purpose Prep, PBIS rewards provides real-time data on student behavior. Additionally, parents can log into the PBIS rewards platform to track and monitor their students progress and communicate with teachers.

To track minor student behavior over time, Empower will use a weekly tier system to determine student supports. The tier system allows advisors, teachers, and students to collaborate on needed supports and communicate expectations for success. During student led conferences, students will speak with their advisors and parents about the progress they have made in the PBIS program. The following is a breakdown of the weekly tier system and associated interventions.

Tier	Balance	Interventions and Rewards

Tier 1	Student has a weekly balance of 10 or more points.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conference with Advisor • Positive Phone Call • Choice of Reward • Announcement Recognition
Tier 2	Students has a weekly balance of 5 or more points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conference with Advisor • Choice of Reward • Announcement Recognition
Tier 3	Student has a weekly balance of 0 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conference with Advisor
Tier 4	Student has a weekly between 0 and -5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conference with Advisor
Tier 5	Student has a weekly balance less than -5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conference with Behavior Interventionalist • Assigned Purpose Prep Intervention

Comprehensive Bullying Education and Prevention (Also included in School Culture Section)

Every student deserves a school environment free of bullying, harassment, and intimidation. The Jamari Terrell Williams Act of 2018 outlines the practices and policies schools must take to ensure that every claim of bullying, harassment, and intimidation is thoroughly investigated, and the appropriate follow up action is taken. It is imperative that students, teachers, and families understand what bullying is and work together to eliminate it in schools. According to the Center for Disease Control, the suicide rate for individuals between the ages of 10 and 24, increased almost 60% between 2007 and 2018. With the stakes so high, Empower will take an aggressive approach to prevent bullying at our school.

In the spirit of and in accordance with the Jamari Terrell Williams Act of 2018, Empower Community School will include bullying education in our daily circle time, employ restorative practices that focus on healing for the harmed and harmer, and actively teach all stakeholders what to do if they are a victim of or have witnessed bullying. In addition to circle time, students, faculty members, and parents will also serve on a joint committee to discuss bullying and, when necessary, make recommendations to the administration for improvement. We firmly believe schools are a place for equitable collaboration between educators, scholars, families, and the broader community, and welcome the input, advocacy, and action of all stakeholders to ensure that every Empower student is free of bullying, harassment, and intimidation.

Restorative Practices (Also included in School Culture Section)

“Restorative justice practices allow schools to create individualized solutions that are manageable for the offending students to fulfill, allow victims to receive closure, and repair the harm caused by the misbehavior.”^[3] By implementing restorative practices at Empower, we honor the individuality of every student and situation while focusing on how students can take responsibility of their

mistakes to grow socially and emotionally while building trust in and relationships with others. Restorative practices are not a replacement for traditional discipline methods, such as suspension. Instead, they are tools used to allow students to take control of their actions and the impact that their behavior has on others. Additionally, students will have the opportunity to make the situation right with the individual or community that was impacted. It should be noted that restorative practices are not meant to be used in cases of bullying or harassment because these instances are indicative of the fact that the offender has already established a position of power, which makes it challenging to repair harm with a peer. At Empower, our restorative plan is guided by the following principles:

- Our words, actions, and behaviors are powerful
- The offended and offender are equally important
- How we make others feel is just as important as what we do
- We right our wrongs
- Every apology should come with a repairing action

Below is a sample restorative conversation script:[\[4\]](#)

Using the conference script, offenders are asked these restorative questions:

- “What happened?”
- “What were you thinking about at the time?”
- “What have you thought about since?”
- “Who has been affected by what you have done?”
- “What do you think you need to do to make things right?”

Victims are asked these restorative questions:

- “What did you think when you realized what happened?”
- “What impact has the incident had on you and others?”
- “What has been the hardest thing for you?”
- “What do you think needs to happen to make things right?”

Major Discipline Infractions

Major discipline infractions will be referred to the Dean of Students. In collaboration with the student and behavioral interventionist, appropriate interventions will be assigned. Teachers will complete the referral in PBIS Rewards, and the Dean of Students/and or behavioral interventionist will complete the process by entering the decided upon interventions in portal. The goal of all interventions is for the student to take ownership of their actions and develop, with appropriate supports, a plan to restore the situation and move forward successfully.

Discipline Definitions

To promote clarity and consistency while maintaining efficient mechanisms for reporting discipline actions to the Alabama State Department of Education, Empower community school will maintain the discipline definitions framework of the Bessemer City School System with minor adjustments. Offenses that have been reclassified are highlighted below:

Class I Violations (Classroom Handled Offenses)

101. EXCESSIVE TARDINESS - Three or more incidents of reporting late to school, class, or assigned area during a calendar month.

102. DISTRACTION OF OTHER STUDENTS OR THE SCHOOL PROGRAM IN GENERAL – Any behavior which is disruptive to the educational process.

103. NON-CONFORMITY TO DRESS CODE

104. MINOR DISRUPTION ON A SCHOOL BUS

105. INAPPROPRIATE PUBLIC DISPLAY OF AFFECTION

106. LITTERING OF SCHOOL PROPERTY

107. FAILURE TO COME TO CLASS PREPARED WITH ALL NECESSARY MATERIALS

108. UNAUTHORIZED USE OF SCHOOL OR ANOTHER PERSON'S PERSONAL PROPERTY

109. POSSESSION OF NUISANCE ITEMS – Any item which disrupts the instructional day at school or is a distraction on a bus is not allowed. Such items will be confiscated and may be claimed by a parent or guardian Examples include but are not limited to : iPods/MP3 players, radios, toys, trading cards, playing cards, or other hand-held video games. Students bring these items to school at their own risk. The local school is not responsible for attempting to recover these items should they be lost or stolen while at school.

110. FAILURE TO ATTEND ASSIGNED CONSEQUENCES

111. ANY OTHER OFFENSE WHICH THE PRINCIPAL MAY REASONABLY DEEM TO FALL WITHIN THIS

Class I INTERVENTIONS

Class I interventions include, but are not limited to:

- Documented Warning
- Assigned Intervention Modules via Purpose Prep
- Parent Conference
- Meeting with Advisor
- Restorative Circle
- Detention (Repeated Offenses)

CLASS II VIOLATIONS (Office Referral Offense; may result in suspension)

201. DEFIANCE OR DISRESPECT OF SCHOOL BOARD EMPLOYEES AUTHORITY

202. POSSESSION AND/OR USE OF PRESCRIPTION, NON-PRESCRIPTION MEDICATION, INHALANTS, AEROSOL SPRAYS, OR OTHER OVER-THE-COUNTER PRODUCTS

203. INTENTIONALLY TOUCHING OR STRIKING ANOTHER PERSON AGAINST THE WILL OF THE OTHER

204. USE OF PROFANE OR OBSCENE LANGUAGE OR POSSESSION OF PORNOGRAPHIC, SUGGESTIVE, OR INAPPROPRIATE MATERIAL

205. VANDALISM - Intentional and deliberate action resulting in injury or damages of less than \$200 to public property or the real or personal property of another. A police report will be filed and student will be expected to pay for damages.

206. "SKIPPING" CLASS OR SCHOOL – Unauthorized absence from class or school. Group skip days are included in this category and are not permitted by the Board of Education.
207. ACADEMIC DISHONESTY – A breach of academic integrity as outlined in the Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty section in this handbook. Typically, with instances of academic dishonesty, the student will receive either reduced credit or no credit on the particular assignment along with other appropriate disciplinary action.
208. GAMBLING – Any participation in games of chance for money and/or other items of value.
209. INTENTIONALLY PROVIDING FALSE INFORMATION TO A SCHOOL BOARD EMPLOYEE
210. STEALING-LARCENY-PETTY THEFT – The intentional taking, and/or carrying away of property valued at less than \$100 belonging to or in the possession or custody of another
211. POSSESSION OF STOLEN PROPERTY - The possession of stolen property valued at or less than \$100 with the knowledge that it is stolen
212. THREATS TO DO EXTORTION – Verbal or written
213. TRESPASSING - Willfully entering or remaining in any school property after being warned by an authorized person
214. POSSESSION AND/OR IGNITING FIREWORKS OR FIRECRACKERS
215. INAPPROPRIATE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR - VERBAL, WRITTEN, OR PHYSICAL
216. USE OF PHYSICAL OR GRAPHIC OBSCENE GESTURES
217. THE UNAUTHORIZED USE OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICES
218. USE OF RACIAL OR ETHNIC INSULTS OR SLURS - Verbal or written affronts of a racial or ethnic nature
219. POSSESSION OF INAPPROPRIATE DEVICES – Including but not limited to ammunition, artificial weapons, facsimiles and/or replicas
220. DISRUPTION ON A SCHOOL BUS
221. UNAUTHORIZED ORGANIZATION – Any on campus participation in non-sanctioned fraternities, sororities, secret societies, or non-affiliated school clubs
222. MINOR VIOLATION OF STUDENT ACCEPTABLE USE POLICY FOR THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY
223. ANY OTHER OFFENSE WHICH THE PRINCIPAL MAY REASONABLY DEEM TO FALL WITHIN THIS CATEGORY
224. FIGHTING - Any physical conflict involving two or more individuals (moved from Class III)
225. POSSESSION AND/OR USE OF TOBACCO PRODUCTS, LIGHTERS, MATCHES, ELECTRONIC - CIGARETTES/VAPOR, SYNTHETIC NICOTINE PRODUCTS (moved from Class III)

Class II Interventions

- Assigned Intervention Modules via Purpose Prep
- Meeting with Advisor
- Parent Conference
- Restorative Circle
- Restorative Meeting
- Community Service
- PST Referral
- Counseling Referral
- Detention (Repeated Offenses)
- Suspension (Not to exceed 3 days)

Class III Violations (Office Referral Offenses/May Result In Suspension or Expulsion)

302. MISUSE OR ABUSE OF PRESCRIPTION OR NON-PRESCRIPTION MEDICATION, INHALANTS, AEROSOL, SPRAYS, OR OTHER OVER-THE-COUNTER PRODUCTS – Required medications must be delivered to the school by the parent or other responsible adult accompanied by the completed Alabama State Department of Education designated medication authorization form and kept in accordance with the school policy.

303. STEALING-THEFT-POSSESSION OF STOLEN PROPERTY – Knowingly or intentionally taking, obtaining, receiving, or exerting unauthorized control over property valued at more than \$100 belonging to another person

304. BURGLARY OF SCHOOL PROPERTY - Entering or remaining in a structure or conveyance with the intent to commit an offense therein

305. CRIMINAL MISCHIEF/VANDALISM – Willful and malicious injury or damages at or in excess of \$200 to public property or to real or personal property belonging to another

306. POSSESSION OF A KNIFE

307. POSSESSION OF DANGEROUS DEVICES – including but not limited to mace, tear gas, “blank” guns, facsimiles, replicas, and/or artificial weapons or any item used inappropriately with intent to harm

308. INDIVIDUALS AND/OR GROUPS INCITING OR PARTICIPATING IN UNAUTHORIZED DEMONSTRATIONS AND/OR DISORDERLY ACTIVITIES which lead to disruption of the normal school program. This includes any gang related behavior and instigators

309. THREAT, HARASSMENT, INTIMIDATION OR BULLYING OF STUDENTS - The threat by word or act to do harm to another student with an apparent ability to do so, or doing some act which creates a well-founded fear in the person that such violence is imminent. Harassment is inclusive of name-calling, as well as conduct, which directly affect another individual’s emotional state of mind. Racial slurs are a form of bullying included in this violation

311. DIRECTING OBSCENE, PROFANE LANGUAGE OR GESTURES (VERBAL OR WRITTEN) TO A SCHOOL BOARD EMPLOYEE

312. SEXUAL HARASSMENT – Any unwelcomed sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other unwelcomed verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature

313. MAJOR VIOLATION OF STUDENT ACCEPTABLE USE POLICY FOR THE USE OF

TECHNOLOGY – Examples of major violations could include: tampering with another student’s class work; the intentional use of school system or personal technology, while on school property , to break laws involving theft, identity theft, and distribution of stolen and/or illegal items; the intentional destruction of school-owned technology equipment; the intentional disruption of network services resulting in school or district level network outages; viewing or sending of obscene material.

314. INTENTIONALLY PROVIDING FALSE INFORMATION TO A SCHOOL BOARD EMPLOYEE OR HINDERING THE INVESTIGATION IN REGARD TO A CLASS III OFFENSE

315. UNJUSTIFIED ACTIVATION OF A FIRE ALARM SYSTEM OR ITS COMPONENTS, EMERGENCY OR SECURITY SYSTEMS

316. ASSAULT

317. THE MISUSE AND/OR ABUSE OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICES - Sending inappropriate messages and/or images via electronic communication devices or any other form of technology whether owned or owned by the school district, at any time may result in serious school, personal, and /or civil or criminal legal consequences

318. SEXUAL OFFENSES – Acts of a sexual nature including, but not limited to lewd behavior, indecent exposure, sexual contact, sexual intercourse, sexting, viewing or sharing obscene material, or other conduct intended to result in sexual gratification

319. MISUSE OR ABUSE OF PRESCRIPTION DRUGS – The unauthorized use, sale, transfer, possession, soliciting, trafficking, misuse of prescription drugs. These include any drug that requires a doctor’s prescription to legally possess

320. ALCOHOL AND ILLEGAL DRUGS - The unauthorized use, sale, transfer, possession, soliciting, trafficking, misuse, and/or abuse of drugs. These include alcoholic beverages, barbiturates, central nervous system stimulants, hallucinogens, synthetic replicas, drug paraphernalia, and all other drugs to which the narcotic and drug abuse laws of the United States, local municipalities, and the State of Alabama apply.

321. ANY OTHER OFFENSE WHICH THE PRINCIPAL MAY REASONABLY DEEM TO FALL WITHIN THIS

Class III INTERVENTIONS

Class III offenses will be referred for a hearing. Interventions include, but are not limited to:

- Assigned Intervention Modules via Purpose Prep
- Meeting with Advisor
- Parent Conference
- Restorative Circle
- Restorative Meeting
- Community Service
- PST Referral
- Counseling Referral
- Detention (Repeated Offenses)
- Suspension (Not to exceed 10 days)
- Referral to Alternative Setting (Not to exceed 45 days)
- Recommended Expulsion

Class IV Violations (Office Referral Offenses/May Result In Suspension or Expulsion)

402. ARSON – The willful and malicious burning of any part of school property

403. ASSAULT UPON SCHOOL BOARD EMPLOYEES – The intentional touching or striking of a school employee against his or her will or the intentional causing of bodily harm to a School Board employee

404. POSSESSION OR DISCHARGING OF DANGEROUS WEAPONS OR DEVICES – in the school building, on the school campus, in a vehicle, or at any school related function. The term “dangerous weapon” means a firearm or anything designed, made, or adapted for the purpose of inflicting death or serious physical injury and such term includes but not limited to a bazooka, hand grenade, missile, or explosive or “incendiary device,” a pistol, rifle, or shotgun, or a switch-blade knife, gravity knife, stiletto, sword or dagger, brass knuckles. **Recommended Expulsion**

405. EXPLOSIVES – Preparing, possessing, or igniting on School Board property explosives likely to cause serious bodily injury or property damage; **Recommended Expulsion**

406. SEXUAL MISCONDUCT - Acts of a sexual nature including, but not limited to, abuse, battery, electronic pornography, attempted rape, or rape

407. AGGRAVATED ASSAULT – Intentionally causing great bodily harm, disability, or permanent disfigurement; use of a deadly weapon; **Recommended Expulsion**

408. ROBBERY – The taking of money or other personal property from a person by force, violence, assault or putting the person in fear of same

410. BOMB THREAT – Any such communication(s) which has the effect of interrupting the education environment

411. POSSESSION OF A HANDGUN; **Recommended Expulsion**

414. TERRORIST THREAT - Threatening by any means (verbal, written or otherwise) to commit a crime of violence or to damage any property in a manner that intentionally or recklessly terrorizes another person or causes disruption of school activities

415. THE INTENTIONAL THREAT, HARASSMENT, INTIMIDATION, STRIKING OR BULLYING OF A SCHOOL BOARD EMPLOYEE – The threat by word or act to do harm to an employee, with an apparent ability to do so, and doing some act which creates a well-founded fear in the person that such violence is imminent. Harassment is inclusive of name-calling, as well as conduct, which directly affect another individual’s emotional state of mind

416. ANY SECOND MAJOR OFFENSE FROM THE CLASS III CATEGORY

417. ANY OTHER OFFENSE WHICH THE PRINCIPAL MAY REASONABLY DEEM TO FALL WITHIN THIS CATEGORY

Class IV INTERVENTIONS

Class IV offenses will be referred for a hearing. Interventions include, but are not limited to:

- Assigned Intervention Modules via Purpose Prep
- Meeting with Advisor
- Parent Conference

- Restorative Circle
- Restorative Meeting
- Community Service
- PST Referral
- Counseling Referral
- Detention (Repeated Offenses)
- Suspension (Not to exceed 10 days)
- Referral to Alternative Setting (Not to exceed 45 days)
- Recommended Expulsion

Suspensions, Expulsions, and Appeals

Empower is committed to protecting the educational rights and safety of all students. Students who have been referred for any discipline infraction have the right to due process, including:

- Being provided the reason for consideration of the intervention/consequence
- Present their side of the story
- Bring forth any applicable witnesses or evidence
- Receive equal treatment without regard to race, sex, creed, color, religion, national origin or disability.

If the school administrator or designee, is considering suspension as an intervention, the above due processes must be documented. School administrators are required to provide the student and legal guardian, in writing, the notice of suspension, including any stipulations for reinstatement, such as a restorative conference or restitution. Suspensions for Class II infractions are at the administrator's discretion and may not be appealed.

If an administrator has determined that a Class III or IV offense has occurred, the student will be given the opportunity to present his or her case during a formal due process hearing. The Head of School will conduct the due process hearing using the following protocol:

- The student must appear with a legal guardian.
- The school administrator recommended the Class III or IV hearing must present all evidence concerning the alleged violation.
- The student will be provided an opportunity to admit or deny the allegation.
- The student will be provided the opportunity to present their side of the story and any applicable evidence.
- The student will be allowed to call witnesses on their behalf.
- The Head of School will decide whether or not the offense has occurred and the appropriate intervention/consequence.
- The head of school shall prepare a written explanation of the allegations, applicable evidence, and appropriate intervention.
- The written explanation shall be provided to the student and parent in writing within 48 hours.

If the student or parent/guardian wishes, they have the right to appeal the Head of School's decision to the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors will convene a minimum of 3 members to for the appeal, which will use the following protocol:

- The Head of School will present his written report to the board, including evidence of due process.
- The student will have the opportunity to present their side of the facts.
- The parent will have the opportunity to advocate on behalf of their student.
- Within 48 hours, the Board of Directors must present the parent, student, and Head of

School with written notice of their decision. If the Board overturns the decision of the Head of School, the Head of School is responsible for assigning an alternative reasonable consequence.

- The decision of the Board of Directors is final.

Plan for Students Out of School Long-term

If a student has been expelled or removed from school for more than 10 days, they will be given the opportunity to complete all assignments virtually with the same services they would have been provided had they been at school, including special education and 504 services. In collaboration with the student's teachers and advisor, the Director of Student Supports will meet with the student and parent/guardian to create a remote individualized learning plan, including steps for progress monitoring. Once a student is allowed to return to school, the team will reconvene to create a safe reentry plan for the student.

Rights of Special Education Students and Students with Disabilities

Empower Community School recognizes the rights of all students, including students with disabilities and special education students. Teachers, advisors, and other staff members will collaborate with the Dean of Students and Director of Student Support to ensure that student behavior needs, and goals are appropriately identified, documented, and serviced with a goal to provide students with the appropriate supports so that the behavior does not escalate to a serious violation. In addition to our traditional staff, Empower will employ behavioral interventionist to support the needs of special education students and students with disabilities. For consistency purposes, the following procedures for when a special education or student with a disability has committed a Class III or IV violation have been adopted from the Bessemer City Schools code of conduct. These processes comply with all local, state, and federal laws and designed to ensure the student is treated fairly while having equitable access to the school and curriculum.

Special Education Students and Class III/IV Violations

When a special education student commits a Class III or IV offense, the Dean of Students shall initiate procedures to have the student's Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) Committee address the behavior problem. The IEP Committee will decide if the offense was related to the area of disability and will decide the appropriate action to be taken. The IEP Committee will also conduct a functional behavior assessment if one has not been previously conducted and will consult or construct a behavior intervention plan. All revisions to the student's IEP must be documented within the current IEP. Only IEP Committee may change a special education student's placement. In no case shall a student receiving special education services be excluded from school for more than ten cumulative days without the IEP team meeting and determining that a change of placement is necessary.

Students with Disabilities and Class III or IV Violations

When a student with a disability commits a Class III or IV offense, the Dean of Students shall initiate procedures to have the student's 504 Committee address the behavior problem. The 504 Committee will decide if the offense was related to the area of disability and will decide the appropriate action to be taken. The 504 Committee will also conduct a functional behavior assessment if one has not been previously conducted and will consult or construct a behavior intervention plan. All revisions to the student's 504 must be documented within the current 504. Only 504 Committee may change a student with a disability's placement. In no case shall a student receiving special education services be excluded from school for more than ten cumulative days without the 504 team meeting and determining that a change of placement is necessary.

Communicating the Discipline Plan to Parents

Empower will do more than just communicate the discipline plan to parents. Parents will be involved from the onset, working with students and staff to develop our PBIS matrix, which will outline the specific positive behaviors we would like to see from students. Additionally, parents will receive the student discipline plan during family orientation and acknowledge their receipt of it. Empower will introduce unfamiliar concepts, such as restorative practices, to parents and ensure that every parent is signed up for our PBIS Rewards system which allows them to monitor their student’s behavioral progress. Parents and students who enter midyear will meet with the Director of Student Supports and their student’s advisor to review the student discipline plan and expectations.

[1] Lassen, S. R., Steele, M. M., & Sailor, W. (2006). The relationship of school-wide positive behavior support to academic achievement in an urban middle school. *Psychology in the Schools*, 43, 701-712. doi: 10.1002/pits.20177

[2] Horner, Robert; Sugai, George; Lewis, Timothy. Is School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) An Evidence-Based Practice? Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. March 2020

[3] Payne, A. A., & Welch, K. (2015). Restorative justice in schools: The influence of race on restorative discipline. *Youth & Society*, 47(4), 539-564.

[4] IIRP Graduate School. Defining Restorative: 5.1 Restorative Conference. 2020. Retrieved from www.iirp.edu

Attachments

Section 11: Student Discipline Policy and Plan

11.1	Attachment 9-School Discipline Plan	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 1:11 PM	PDF / 265.458 KB
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12. Family and Community Involvement

Empower’s Parent and Community Engagement Framework

Researcher Joyce Epstein and colleagues developed the School-Family-Community Partnership Model. The model outlines how schools can outline a comprehensive program for schools to connect with families and the community. Empower’s family and community engagement framework is grounded in this model. The required components of the framework are designed to provide opportunities for parents to be informed and engaged in their student’s education while providing critical feedback on the school’s activities and progress. Each activity in the framework is aligned to one of the model’s components. The six components of the model are:

1. **Parenting:** Type 1 involvement occurs when family practices and home environments support “children as students” and when schools understand their children’s families.
2. **Communicating:** Type 2 involvement occurs when educators, students, and families

“design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications.”

3. **Volunteering:** Type 3 involvement occurs when educators, students, and families “recruit and organize parent help and support” and count parents as an audience for student activities.
4. **Learning at Home:** Type 4 involvement occurs when information, ideas, or training are provided to educate families about how they can “help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.”
5. **Decision Making:** Type 5 involvement occurs when schools “include parents in school decisions” and “develop parent leaders and representatives.”
6. **Collaborating with the Community:** Type 6 involvement occurs when community services, resources, and partners are integrated into the educational process to “strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.”

Building the Village: Parent and Community Engagement to Date

Since July 2020, Empower Community School has engaged parents and community members via monthly virtual informational sessions with the purpose of sharing the mission, vision, and key components of the school. Parent and community members were able to ask questions about the school and provide feedback on our programming.

Additionally, Empower Community School has built a strong working relationship with the St. Francis of Assisi School Committee. St. Francis of Assisi was a historically black elementary school located in on the north side of Bessemer. Although the school has been closed over 20 years, the members of the school committee have remained involved in promoting educational opportunity for students of Bessemer. Since late February, the group has been volunteering with Empower to contact local daycares to provide information about the school and invite parents and other community members to our information sessions. Empower’s leadership team has also presented to Black Alabamians for Education’s Bessemer focus group, which consists of community leaders, faith leaders, and educators.

The school has also increased our social media footprint. For a reference point, the two charter schools open in Jefferson County have an average of 740 followers while Empower has currently has 850 followers. The school plans to connect with other community agencies, such as the housing authority, neighborhood organizations, and faith based institutions to communicate about the school’s plans and progress.

Connecting the Village: Parent Involvement from Approval to Opening

Visual Advertising (Communicating): The school has already secured billboard advertising space at 9th Avenue (also known as Bessemer Super Highway), which is a main thoroughway in Bessemer. Located less than a mile from the proposed elementary school location (2400 7th Ave North), the location receives over 82,000 impressions weekly. The billboard will allow families to connect via the school’s website and or text message.

Digital Advertising (Communicating): Empower continually informs the community about recruitment, enrollment, and engagements event via social media, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Materials will be posted in both English and Spanish to ensure that families whose second language is English receive up to date information about the school.

Print Advertising (Communicating): Empower will also use print advertisements to communicate with families, including flyers, posters, and handouts situated, with appropriate permission, at local

businesses. To date, Empower's community engagement team has identified and connected with over 40 early childhood development centers to inform parents about the school and enrollment procedures.

Community Information Sessions (Communicating): To date, Empower has hosted 5 Virtual Community Information Sessions to inform members of the community about the school and receive feedback on the school model. This process will continue upon approval, and the school is prepared to offer continuous community sessions once opened.

Physical Activities (Communicating): Empower's community support team will canvas the Bessemer community to have face to face interactions with potential parents and students. These activities include presenting at local events of other community organizations, canvassing youth athletic events, and presenting to the faith community whenever possible.

Strengthening the Village: Parent and Community Involvement Post Opening

In an effort to encourage consistent parent and community involvement, Empower will implement the following measures:

- **Parent Board Membership (Decision Making/Volunteering; required component):** In accordance with Alabama Act 2015-3, a minimum of 20% of Empower's school board will consist of parents. Parent board members will be selected in the same way as all other board members and have the same rights and responsibilities. Parent representation on the school board provides parents a seat at the decision making table.
- **Advisory Boards (Volunteering/Collaborating With the Community) :** In an effort to further involve key stakeholder groups, Empower Community School's By-Laws provide for the creation of an Advisory Boards. The two advisory boards for Empower Community School will be a Parental Advisory Board and a Community Advisory Board, which will be composed of members of our parent and neighborhood communities. ECS will actively seek the participation of the various stakeholder groups listed above through community outreach.
- **Open Door Policy (Communicating):** With prior notice, parents will be able to observe their child in the school setting. Clear guidelines will be in place to ensure student safety and minimum interruptions to the academic environment. At any time, parents are welcome to visit our family resource center.
- **Family Resources Center (Parenting):** Each school site will have a minimum of one dedicated space for a Family Resource Center. In the Family Resource Center, parents will have access to computers and printers at their disposal. Families can use the space to meet with other families, search for employment, or find any other appropriate services. The center will be populated with materials parents can use to support their student. Additionally, the school counselor, Director of Student Supports, and Social Worker will be housed in the Family Resource Center.
- **Comprehensive Parent Communications Systems (Communicating/Learning at Home):** Parents will have multiple ways to communicate with the school. In addition to the traditional methods of connecting via email and phone, parents, teachers, and students will be able to connect directly using PowerSchool Unified, which is an integrated student information system that also includes direct access for parents to communicate with teachers. Additionally, parents will be able to log into the platform to view student assignments and tutorials so they can assist with student homework.
- **Parent and Community Newsletters (Communicating):** Parent and Community newsletters will be produced in print and online in both English and Spanish. Newsletters will help parents and community members stay informed about the school's progress, key events, and celebrations of students and staff.
- **Student Led Conferences (Parenting/Communicating/Learning at Home; Required Component):** Student led conferences provide parents with an opportunity to hear directly

from their student about academic, social, and emotional progress. Additionally, students will advocate for the support they need from their parents and teachers.

- Parent Surveys (Collaborating with the Community/Communicating; Required Component): Parent surveys provide an opportunity for parents to share their perspectives on the school's progress. An integral part of our feedback process, parent surveys will provide the school with useful information to assess the effectiveness of program implementation and available resources.

Attachments

Section 12: Family and Community Involvement

12.1	Letters of Support	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 4:49 PM	PDF / 419.667 KB
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13. Partnership or Contractual Relationships

ECS has partnered with New Schools for Alabama for additional operations capacity. NSFA provides CFO/COO level technical assistance to their partner schools and also arranges additional providers for essential services. ECS will be utilizing NSFA's carefully selected foodservice, back-office, and facilities providers to ensure capable startup and operations functions occur in critical areas. All of these providers are best in class and have been supporting and advising charter schools for ten or more years. LBMC W Squared is the back-office provider and provides a cloud-based accounting, internal control, purchasing, cash management, financial reporting, payroll, benefits, and HR function for the school. LBMC W Squared is a large regional accounting firm with extraordinary capacity and a niche in serving charter schools. NSFA's CFO/COO support provides senior leadership and advisory support that small schools are rarely able to access on their own and works with the board and leadership on annual budgeting, startup and operations, facilities financing, and strategic planning. NSFA also has access to SchoolPrint, a nonprofit facilities advisory program that provides guidance and support to charter schools who are developing or renovating facilities.

Key partners that bring operations capacity include NSFA's technical assistance team led by Chris Reynolds (a former charter leader with experience starting up and running ten schools in four states, including major school facilities renovation projects), the foodservice advisory firm School Food Wellness Group, the back-office accounting provider, LBMC W Squared, and additional support for federal programs, and technology partners, and strategic planning.

Specific facility projects that NSFA has led or been part of include advising on lease and building renovations and district partnerships in Little Rock, AR as well as the design, development, financing and renovation of over 500,000 square feet of public school facilities in Michigan, Illinois, Texas, and Tennessee. These include district buildings, modular campuses, bank financing, capital projects, and New Market Tax Credit financing. We are confident that NSFA has more than adequate expertise to help us develop and finance a facility in Bessemer City.

Empower is also excited to work with the Bessemer Redevelopment Corporation, a 501c3 organizations with a mission to improve the quality of life for residents across Bessemer. The organization has invested heavily in the Northside neighborhood, and Empower is excited to partner with Bessemer Redevelopment Corporation and the broader community to bring high-quality educational options to the area.

Attachments

Section 13: Partnership or Contractual Relationships

13.1	Attachment-Bessemer Redevelopment Corporation	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 6:00 PM	PDF / 44.383 KB
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14. Educational Service Providers (ESP) and Other Partnerships

Empower Community School will not use an Educational Service Provider.

Attachments

Section 14: Educational Service Providers (ESP) and Other Partnerships

14.1	N/A	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 7:26 PM	DOCX / 58.402 KB
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15. Educational Program Capacity

Organizational Leadership

Under the supervision of the board of directors, Empower Community School’s school leadership team is led by the Head of School/Executive Director, Mr. Anthony Oliver. The leadership team will consist of the following positions: Director of Academics-Elementary, Director of Academics-Middle, Director of Operations, and Student Services Coordinator. During the planning year, Empower intends to recruit, hire, train, and retain a team of high quality people to fill these roles.

Empower’s unique educational model is designed to support student academic, social, and emotional growth. Our board of directors is composed of a diverse group of individuals with unique skill sets to support the organization’s mission. These individuals include:

Dr. Matt L. Smith: Dr. Smith has over a decade of experience working in public schools. During his time at Clayton County Public Schools, he served as a teacher, school improvement specialist, data analyst, gifted coordinator, assistant principal, and principal. Additionally, Dr. Smith has served as a Special Assistant to the Superintendent in Birmingham City Schools, and is currently the Vice President of Policy for A+ Education Partnership, a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to creating great schools for every child. Dr. Smith’s extensive school, district, and policy leadership experience is an asset for Empower Community School.

Justin Murdock: Mr. Murdock has worked in a variety of capacities in service to organizations

committed to improving the educational outcomes of children within the area. He brings a deep passion for STEM learning to the team. For the past several years, Justin has volunteered as an instructor and coach at multiple schools in the Birmingham area teaching coding, rocketry, and robotics.

Grant Brigham: Mr. Brigham is active in the broader Birmingham community. From 2011-2016, he served as the Executive Director of Jones Valley Teaching Farm (JVTF). JVTF is an education-focused nonprofit that works daily with more than 3,500 Pre-K-12 students in the Birmingham City School System. He was selected for and participated in the Alabama Leadership Initiative; served in a two year Fellowship with the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham; worked as a direct partner with Purpose Built Communities. A true community supporter, Mr. Brigham brings a wealth of knowledge and experience relating to educating the whole child.

Cynthia Pinkard: A Bessemer resident and retired educator, Ms. Pinkard, was employed by the Shelby County Board of Education for 27 years as a Reading and Math Coach. In this position, she worked with teachers, students and school administrators and supported all K-6 staff in the implementation of their Reading and Math plans and programs. Additionally, she worked directly with teachers in the schools providing classroom-based demonstrations, one-on-one support, and professional development. Ms. Pinkard has extensive experience analyzing data to support students, teachers, and administrators.

School Leadership

Executive Director/Head of School

A native of Birmingham, Alabama, Anthony began his career in education as a mathematics teacher and coach in the Tarrant and Vestavia Hills school systems. In addition to his work as a teacher, he has also been an assistant principal in Jefferson County Schools and principal in Birmingham City Schools. During his time as a teacher, Mr. Oliver's students met their Annual Yearly Progress Goals (AYP) for five consecutive years, and he mentored over 20 young men each year through the Minority Achievement Council Program (MAC). As an assistant principal, Mr. Oliver was a critical piece of the administrative team that led a 20% increase in student proficiency in reading and math while reducing discipline infractions by 42%. During his two years as a principal in Birmingham City Schools, student chronic absenteeism reduced by 19% while the school implemented a comprehensive positive behavior and support system using PBIS rewards. One key initiative implemented during his tenure was the implementation of data-driven professional learning communities (PLCs) to drive both adult and student learning. In addition to his work in schools, Mr. Oliver has also worked as an independent educational consultant, reviewing charter school applications across the southeast.

Before becoming a school leader, he served as the founding Executive Director at Breakthrough Birmingham and volunteered on various nonprofit boards. He holds a B.A. in Mathematics from the Virginia Military Institute, an M.A.E. in Mathematics Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Alabama-Birmingham, and an Ed. M in School Leadership from Harvard University. He is currently pursuing an Ed.D from Vanderbilt's Peabody College of Education.

In preparation for the launch of Empower Community School, Mr. Oliver has participated in several fellowship opportunities, including:

New Schools for Alabama School Founders Program: The school founders' program is a highly-selective yearlong fellowship for aspiring charter school founders in Alabama. Founders were recruited, selected, and trained to launch new, high quality charter schools across the state. Mr. Oliver was one of two individuals selected for the fellowship during the summer of 2020.

Citizens of the World Leader Institute: CWC Leader Institute supports leaders in addressing both adaptive and technical aspects of the work needed to consciously and authentically lead a diverse-by-design school. Program outcomes focus primarily on “The Four Corners” (CWC Model, Leadership Foundational Skills, Coalition Building, Personal Development) foundational aspects that CWC believes any leader requires in order to create, run, and thrive within a student-centered, equity-based school.

4.0 Schools Essentials Fellowship: The Essentials Fellowship supports fellows from the idea (or “concept”) phase to a small-scale pop-up experience for the families, educators, and students you want to work with — a first step into testing and exploring new ideas. During his time in the Essentials Fellowship, Mr. Oliver supported families in implementing social and emotional learning tools at home with their students. Their experiences and feedback were critical in the development of the Empower Community School Model.

Directors and Coordinator Positions

Empower’s leadership team also consists of several director and coordinator positions to support student academic, social, and emotional growth:

- Director(s) of Academics
- Director of Finance and Operations
- Student Services Coordinator
- Dean of Culture

The qualifications for each of these positions are listed in Attachment 14. Leadership team positions will be filled no later than January 2022. Empower will implement a robust recruitment plan to attract, identify, and screen applicants for these positions. By offering competitive wages, Retirement Systems of Alabama benefits, and a supportive work environment, Empower looks to attract high quality individuals to support student learning.

The application process for each position will include:

- Initial screening for appropriate education and qualifications
- Phone interview
- Performance task
- In-person interview

Empower’s entire school leadership team will actively participate in the educational development of the school. The following RACI chart (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, and Informed) outline each members responsibilities.

Attachments

Section 15: Educational Program Capacity

15.1	Attachment 14- Proposed Leadership Team Job Descriptions	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 1:19 PM	PDF / 510.395 KB

15.2 [Attachment 13-School Leader Bio and Resume](#)

Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 1:19 PM

PDF / 232.426 KB

OPERATIONS PLAN AND CAPACITY

18. Legal Status and Governing Documents

Empower Community School is constituted as an Alabama non-profit corporation pursuant to Alabama law and has received its Certificate of Formation. Empower Community School has also received recognition of exemption under Section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code. (relative evidence documents can be found in **Attachment 15**)

Attachments

Section 18: Legal Status and Governing Documents

18.1	Attachment 16- Statement of Assurances	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 3:35 PM	PDF / 116.327 KB
18.2	Attachment 15 - Legal Status and Governing Documents	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 1:24 PM	PDF / 5.914 MB

19. Organization Structure and Relationships

Empower Community School's organization chart is attached as Attachment 17.

Attachments

Section 19: Organization Structure and Relationships

19.1	Attachment 17-Org. Chart	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 1:48 PM	PDF / 100.026 KB
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20. Governing Board

Empower Community School's By-Laws are included as **Attachment 18**.

Empower Community School Board of Directors is a self-perpetuating board. A Nominating Committee will be formed whenever a vacancy exists on the Board. The Nominating Committee is instructed in the By-Laws to receive input from both community leaders and parents prior to submitting a list of nominations to the Board for approval. Further nominations will be taken from the floor. As provided in the By-Laws, at least 20% of the members of the Board of Directors must be parents of students attending Empower Community School. This will ensure all stakeholders have a voice and involvement in the selection of Directors. In an effort to further involve key stakeholder groups, ECS By-Laws provide for the creation of Advisory Boards. The two advisory boards for Empower Community School will be a Parental Advisory Board and a Community Advisory Board, which will be composed of members of our parent and neighborhood communities. The Advisory Boards are one indicator for how ECS will attempt to receive community participation and input on various topics affecting the school.

Empower Community School's Accountability plan will consistently be used to evaluate school progress annually and for the term of the charter. The Board of Directors, through its Academic Accountability Committee, will review progress towards measures in the accountability plan. The Executive Director/Head of School will be evaluated on these measures and for every assessment described below, and the school has critical goals outlined in the Accountability Plan.

The Board of Directors will provide effective and sound oversight of the school. School governance and leadership will effectively support the essential work of the school to promote teaching and learning in schools.

Administrative Audit

The Board of Directors will conduct an annual internal administrative audit, consisting of:

- Board of Directors self-review
- Board of Directors review of the Executive Director / Head of School
- Executive Director's review of the Director of Academics

This internal review will involve a performance review and an opportunity to discuss ways of improving administrative structure and policies.

Monthly Financial Status

The Executive Director/Head of School, in coordination with the Director of Finance and Operations, will produce a monthly financial statement to present at the monthly Board of Directors' meetings showing the current financial state of Empowerment Community School.

Founding Board

The Founding Board is a group of individuals who have worked formally on the organization of Empower Community School since July of 2020. Board members were initially invited based upon clarity of vision, relevant skills and expertise, and willingness to dedicate themselves to educational excellence, and this group has reviewed, contributed to, and supported this charter application and the school design.

Board members were selected after a comprehensive process and were evaluated on the criteria of skills/expertise, teamwork, available time and energy, and philosophical alignment with the mission of Empower Community School. At present, we intend Anthony Oliver to serve as the school's Founding Executive Director/Head of School. At the time of chartering, the Board will review this intent, establish clear expectations for the Executive Director, and hire the Founding Executive Director.

Founding Board Members

Justin Murdock, Board Chair, has worked in a variety of capacities in service to organizations committed to improving the educational outcomes of children within the area. For the past several years, Justin has volunteered as an instructor and coach at multiple schools in the Birmingham area teaching coding, rocketry, and robotics, demonstrating his passion for STEM education and project-based learning. His teams have competed throughout the state of Alabama and have earned high honors at nearly every event. Justin also works to promote literacy development in young children, and he can often be found volunteering time to read to elementary school classes. Following each book, he leads students through in-depth discussions aimed at bolstering their level of comprehension.

Justin holds a M.Eng degree in Information Engineering and Management from the University of Alabama at Birmingham in addition to multiple professional certifications in Information Technology. He also has a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Theatre from the University of Montevallo.

DeMarcus Rodgers, board vice chairman, graduated from the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) in May 2005 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology and a minor in history and from Jacksonville State University (JSU) in August 2008 with a Master of Science in community agency counseling.

Recently, he had the opportunity to work with the Big Brother Big Sister organization as a big brother and Faithful Friends Mentoring Coordinator, as a counselor at Donaldson Correctional Facility, and as the Veteran's Coordinator at Aletheia House. His last corporate employer was at Family Endeavors as the Program Director where he supervised employees in Birmingham, Tuscaloosa, and Montgomery and connected homeless veterans to community resources. He left his corporate job to follow his passion and started Kuntri Kitchen where he feed people country style barbeque. These experiences have given me an appreciation of what it is like to work with young people and adults who truly need mentoring and guidance. Through these opportunities and along with other experiences gained while at UAB and JSU he developed a strong sense of commitment to the community.

Theo Roshell, MBA, board secretary, is the Vice President of Business Development for Munford Enterprises. He is a relationship builder who strives to be a trusted business advisor. Theo developed his relationship building skills while working as a licensed banker for JP Morgan Chase Bank. While at Chase, he was trained to be a personal financial consultant who worked with mid-market wealth customers. In order to learn more about marketing and sales, Theo left Chase and enrolled in Clark Atlanta University's MBA program where he studied Marketing. Upon graduation, he continued to grow as a relationship builder while also developing his analytical skills as Marketing and Sales Manager at Union Pacific Railroad. As a railroader, Theo was responsible for pricing transportation, as well as building and expanding the organization's customer base. Theo has been an asset to multiple nonprofit organizations since his days as an undergraduate at Texas Southern University. During and since that time, he has been constant volunteer and fundraiser. Today, Theo is commonly known as "Coach Theo" since he coaches multiple age groups in football, basketball, and baseball. He takes every opportunity to mentor children through sports. Theo is also known for trying to expose children to different experiences, which he believes is the primary driver of a well rounded child and society.

Grant Brigham is a Director at ARC Realty, leading investment and development projects for the company and his family. Prior to ARC, Grant was an Entrepreneur in Residence with Timberline Investments (a private equity office based in Birmingham) and served as the Executive Director of Jones Valley Teaching Farm (JVTF) from 2011-2016. JVTF is an education-focused nonprofit that works daily with more than 3,500 Pre-K-12 students in the Birmingham City School System.

Grant has a BA from Furman University; a MA from North Carolina State University; and was selected for and completed a graduate program at the Center for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business. Before graduate school, Grant lived and worked in Uganda, East Africa, helping launch and manage a startup nonprofit that grew into Akola – a leading social enterprise that employs and empowers women entrepreneurs.

Grant is active in the broader Birmingham community. He was selected for and participated in the Alabama Leadership Initiative; served in a two year Fellowship with the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham; worked as a direct partner with Purpose Built Communities – a coordinated holistic community revitalization model that combines quality mixed-income housing, a cradle-to-college education pipeline, health and wellness programs, and targeted neighborhood economic development; and he recently joined the final Torchbearer class for the Community of

Lights campaign – a fundraising initiative to support One Place Metro Alabama Family Justice Center.

Haley Colson Lewis is a native of Birmingham and earned her B.A. from George Washington University, J.D. from Cumberland School of Law and a master's in Public Administration from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Haley began working on statewide environmental issues in 2013 and has been focusing on Clean Air Act and environmental justice issues for the past 6 years.

Haley is an active member of the Birmingham community. She is a member of the Junior League of Birmingham and the League of Women Voters. She also serves on the City of Birmingham Planning Commission as Chair Pro Tempore. Haley is an advocate for comprehensive, long-term policies that promote equity and equality in Alabama.

Cynthia Pinkard is a Bessemer resident and retired Educator from the Shelby County Board of Education where she served as a Reading and Math Coach for 27 years. During her career as an educator, Cynthia has worked with teachers, students and school administrators in a variety of capacities. She not only supported K-6 staff in the implementation of their Reading and Math plans and programs, but she also worked directly with teachers in the schools providing classroom-based demonstrations, one-on-one support and professional development. Cynthia has also tutored individual students and worked with their parents to develop ways to aid the students with their homework and in improving their Math and Reading skills. Additionally, Cynthia worked in partnership with administrators and teachers helping them to collect and analyze data, interpret, and use it to guide to make instructional decisions in order for each student to reach his or her academic potential.

As an active member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Cynthia has volunteered in a wide range of programs addressing education, health, and strengthening the community. Some of those programs included providing bus passes to veterans, raising funds to furnish classrooms, tutoring children who were unable to attend school due to the pandemic, and raising funds to stock a food bank. Debra has also consistently volunteered as the Director of the New Salem Missionary Baptist Church Summer Free Lunch Program where nutritionally balanced, free meals were made available to school children each school day.

Debra Phippen-Johnson has contributed many years of professional and community work experience in federal service and is now retired from the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. During her time of service, Debra was responsible for the overall implementation, management, monitoring and oversight of the Public Housing Agencies in her territory. Some of her work involved the interpretation of policies and procedures, as well as the monitoring of compliance with contractual and regulatory obligations, including grants.

Debra has volunteered with voter registrations and currently is a tutor with the Literacy Council of Central Alabama. She also serves as the Chairperson of the Saint Francis of Assisi School Committee and on the Advisory Board of the School Committee.

Dr. Matt L. Smith currently serves as the Vice President of Policy for the A+ Education Partnership (Montgomery, Alabama). He brings a practitioner's mindset to his advocacy work, with one foot in the statehouse and one foot in the schoolhouse. He gained a love of education from the teachings and back yard experiments of his grandfather, a lifelong Physics teacher. Called to the education profession, Matt became a high school social studies teacher in an urban school district in metropolitan Atlanta and served his school district for 11 years. Before leaving to complete his education leadership doctoral work at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Matt led Morrow Middle School in Morrow, GA as Principal. Matt's major accomplishments include founding the first Dual Language Spanish Immersion program in his school district as well as

leading statewide strategic improvement work with Pennsylvania Department of Education. Matt recognizes that equitable, innovative reform can significantly improve educational outcomes for all children. Matt believes school can be a place that challenges, inspires, and is fun. It is in this process Matt believes we can better prepare all students to be college and career ready and successful within the greater global economy.

Governing Board

Should Empower Community School be granted a charter, the school will be governed by a Board of Directors. This Board, ultimately to be composed of between 7 and 11 members, will hold the charter of Empower Community School and ensure accountability to its mission, financial viability, and adherence to the terms of the charter. Priority selection of Directors will be from members of the Founding Board. This Board will be composed of a diverse, talented group of professionals, including community leaders, parents, business leaders, business owners, participants with technical skills in the areas of law, real estate, finance, federal programming, operations, project and construction management and fundraising. Such a board is desirable to provide independent governance for Empower Community School by a broad coalition of qualified leaders. This group will meet monthly for two hours (at least 10 times each year), in a public space with preannounced meetings, in accordance with the Alabama Open Meetings Act. The Board will record minutes of all meetings and will make these publicly available, in addition to any other necessary documents, in accordance with the Alabama Public Records Act.

The Board's primary role is to provide oversight, while delegating the day-to-day management of school operations to the Executive Director. The Board will ensure that Empower Community School successfully executes the school's mission, is fiscally responsible (implementing sound financial policies and procedures), adheres to the school's charter agreement with the authorizer and is compliant with all applicable local, state and federal laws. The governance and operational policies of Empower Community School will be designed to clearly delegate responsibility to appropriate parties and to set standards and expectations that can be used to measure performance and accountability. To guide the Board's activities, a Board manual will be created and distributed to all members. The Board manual will include, but not be limited to, the following items:

- Overview information, including the school's mission statement and
- By-laws and Articles of Incorporation
- Charter contract
- List of current Board members, offices held and terms
- List of committees, including purposes and objectives of each
- Board policies – including conflicts of interest policies and legal requirements
- School information – educational and organizational information pertaining to the school, such as a brief description of the curriculum, student achievement data and organizational chart
- Operating plan and strategic plan
- Recent reports – financial, administrative, programmatic audit; annual report

The Board manual will be developed in collaboration with the Executive Director and the Board and distributed to all Board members and the executive staff. This manual will give Board members a clear description of their roles and responsibilities and outline the distinction between governance and management. In addition to the Board manual, the school will also create a staff handbook that will include all human resources policies and other information needed for the school staff. A student and family handbook, outlining major school and student policies (i.e., Code of Conduct, enrollment and attendance policies) will also be disseminated to all who attend the school. At the end of each school year, the Executive Director and the Board will review and revise these documents as appropriate.

The Empower Community School Board will be representative of the community and will have a wide range of expertise, including finance, marketing, law, federal programming, fundraising, philanthropy, real-estate, project and construction management, K- 12 school experience, and community building. In addition, the Empower Community School Board will also have two parent representatives on the board. Most importantly, the Empower Community School Board will have committed members who:

- Believe that all children can and will realize high academic achievement
- Dedicate their efforts to furthering the vision and mission of Empower Community School
- Contribute their experience and knowledge to the governance of Empower Community School
- Serve on one or more Board committees and contribute the appropriate time and energy necessary to follow through on assigned tasks

Members of the initial governing board will be seeded from the founding board and initial members will serve staggered terms. One-half (1/2) of the Board will initially serve a two-year term and one half will serve a three-year term. Thereafter, members will be elected to a two-year term to fill the vacancies created by expiring terms. This structure of staggered terms provides stability, while at the same time providing opportunities to infuse the Board with new contributors.

Officers will be elected by the Board and will initially include a Chair, Vice-chair, Secretary, and Treasurer. New officers may be created and filled at any meeting of the Board of Directors.

The Board will meet at least once a month to review Empower Community School's operations and hear reports and updates from each Board member and the school's Executive Director, consider and adopt policies and consider requests and concerns from the larger school community. A majority vote of those present at a Board meeting will constitute action by the Board. The Board may not act unless a quorum of the directors is present.

The Board of Directors of Empower Community School will work efficiently through a committee structure. The initial committees will include a Governance Committee, Academic Accountability, Finance Committee, and Resource Development/Fundraising Committee. The Board may establish other committees and/or task forces from time to time that it deems necessary for carrying out the responsibilities of the Board. Certain tasks will be delegated to the committees which, in turn, will recommend a particular action to the full Board for discussion and vote as required. Each Board Member will serve on at least one committee, based on his or her area of interest and experience. Committees will work closely with the school administration, teaching staff, Board Members and outside individuals and organization, when appropriate, to achieve its objectives.

Financial Oversight

Empower Community School will implement sound financial policies and practices to ensure the long- term viability of the school. These policies include maintaining a balanced budget, creating a comprehensive budgeting process, conducting an annual audit of the financial statements, as well as an audit of internal procedures and controls (via an outside CPA firm), developing a system strong of checks and balances for an internal control environment, and assigning clear roles and responsibilities to school administration, outsourced providers, the Finance Committee and the Board. A Finance Committee has been created by the Board to oversee the financial operations of Empower Community School.

The Committee will work closely with the Director of Finance and Operations, outsourced service providers, and the Executive Director to develop and execute responsible fiscal policies and

practices. On a monthly basis, the Finance Committee will report to the Board on the financial health of the school. The report will include updated financial statements (income statement, balance sheet, cash flow statement) and any other material financial information needed for the Board to carry out its responsibilities.

The Empower Community School Board of Directors and staff will receive training in the Alabama State Ethics Law, Open Meetings Act, Public Records law, and all other applicable state laws for charter schools. Furthermore, legal counsel will provide assistance in monitoring compliance with these state laws and can provide guidance to the board of directors.

The Board shall establish a formal policy to prevent and disclose conflicts of interest. Members and all individuals employed by the school shall abide by such Conflict of Interest policy. Upon request, the Board and school employees shall provide conflict of interest forms to local and state entities demonstrating that Board members and employees are in compliance with conflicts of interest policy.

Board development is a critical part of creating and sustaining a high performing school. The Board of Directors of Empower Community School will invest the necessary funds and time to build an effective governing body. This development will include an annual retreat to review in depth the school's and

Board's performance and to generate annual strategic plans. In addition, the Board will participate yearly in a self-evaluation that will help the Board better understand its strengths and weaknesses and serve as a useful tool for improvement. As part of Follow-on Support from New Schools for Alabama, we will train the Board in the transition from Founding Board to Governing Board and in good Board practice and policy. As necessary, the Board will use secure additional consultants for retreats, resource development and to assist with strategic planning and visioning.

The Board of Directors will maintain a standing Governance Committee that will have responsibility for identifying potential new directors, presenting them to the full board for consideration, and orienting all new members. The Governance Committee, composed of at least three directors, will cultivate relationships with potential new directors, present a slate of nominees to the full Board for selection, and orient new Directors to the business of the Board and the school. The Governance Committee will always recruit new Directors according to the best interests of the school. Potential Directors will include community leaders, parents, business leaders, business owners, and individuals contributing necessary skills to the operations of the board. The Board will also maintain standing committees for Academic Accountability, Finance, and Fundraising. The Academic Accountability Committee will monitor the school's academic progress, using the academic and community goals of the Accountability plan as a guide. The Accountability Committee will ensure that the school meets academic goals, and that academic progress is properly reported in an annual report. The Finance Committee will monitor the financial health of the school, through monthly financial reports and regular monitoring of the financial goals of the Accountability plan. The Finance Committee will monitor the annual audit of the school's finances. The Fundraising Committee will ensure the long-term viability of the school through private fundraising initiatives.

The following is the decision-making process for the Board upon identifying the need for a new policy:

- Board level discussion. The full Board will first discuss the need for the new policy and establish general considerations for the policy
- Assign who will draft the policy. The Executive Director will draft the policy for Board review. The Executive Director will take on this role because he/she is most intimately aware of the day-to-day operations of the school.

- Write a first draft of the policy. The Executive Director will write the first draft of the policy.
- Present draft policy to the board for approval. The Executive Director will present the draft policy to the Board for discussion and approval

Attachments

Section 20: Governing Board

20.1	Attachment 19 - Board Member Information Sheet	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/17/21 6:19 PM	PDF / 1.487 MB
20.2	Attachment 20- Code of Ethics and Conflict of Interest Policies	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 2:02 PM	PDF / 268.8 KB
20.3	Attachment 18- Governing Board By-Laws	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 2:01 PM	PDF / 123.804 KB

21. Advisory Bodies

Advisory Bodies

In an effort to further involve key stakeholder groups, Empower Community School’s By-Laws provide for the creation of an Advisory Boards. The two advisory boards for Empower Community School will be a Parental Advisory Board and a Community Advisory Board, which will be composed of members of our parent and neighborhood communities. The Advisory Boards are one indicator for how ECS will attempt to receive community participation and input on various topics affecting the school. ECS will actively seek the participation of the various stakeholder groups listed above through community outreach. At least one member of the Board of Directors will serve on each Advisory Board in an effort to facilitate and ensure communication between the Advisory Board and the Board of Directors. The Director(s) serving on the Advisory Board will keep the Board of Directors current on any issues with the relevant Advisory Board and can invite members of the Advisory Board to present at a Board of Directors meeting. Further, the Advisory Boards will report to the Executive Director / Head of School to assist the Executive Director / Head of School in addressing issues relevant to the Advisory Board.

Attachments

Section 21: Advisory Bodies

– No Attachments –

22. Grievance/Complaint Process

Empower Community School is committed to providing the best possible conditions for all members of the school community including students, families, visitors, teachers and administrators. Part of this commitment is encouraging an open and frank atmosphere in which any problem, complaint, suggestion or question receives a timely response from school

supervisors and administrators. Fair and honest treatment of all students, family members, visitors and employees is our goal. In pursuit of that end, we will encourage everyone to treat the other with respect.

If a student or parent/guardian disagrees with established rules of conduct, policies or practices, or feel that he/she have been treated unfairly, he or she may express his or her concerns through an informal grievance resolution procedure. A student, parent or guardian may initiate a formal grievance procedure, which is outlined below, to appeal any final decision of school personnel. A person may initiate the formal grievance procedure to resolve complaints of discrimination based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age or disability. A grievance policy and more detailed procedures will be developed, vetted and approved by the Board.

Grievance Procedures:

- I. Step I: Head of School Conference – a parent or guardian shall make a written request for a conference with the Head of School to discuss the grievance and seek resolution.
- II. Step II: Appeal to the Chairman of the Board of Trustees – if the grievance is not resolved in Step I, the grievant may appeal the decision in writing to the Chairman of the Board of Trustees.
- III. Step III: Appeal to the Public Charter School Commission – If the grievance is not resolved at Step II, and it involves an alleged violation of state or local Board policy or state or federal law or state rule, it may be appealed to the State Public Charter School Commission

Attachments

Section 22: Grievance/Complaint Process

– No Attachments –

23. Staff Structure

A cooperative approach will be taken in managing the relationship between Empower Community School's Leadership Team and the rest of the staff. The Empower Leadership Team will include the Executive Director/Head of School, Director of Academics, and the Director of Operations. The Executive Director/Head of School will report directly to the ECS Board of Directors. It is anticipated the Team will meet regularly to discuss, monitor, and track the direction of ECS and its alignment with the school's mission, vision, and purpose. The Executive Director/Head of School, as the school leader, will be responsible for all aspects of day-to-day operations and administration of the school, within the

scope of the Board of Directors' operating policy and in compliance with all state and federal guidelines for school operations. The Director of Operations will work directly with and report to the Executive Director/Head of School to ensure effective management of the business model and reaching of the school's goals. The Director of Academics will oversee and evaluate the instructional facility and staff. The Director of Academics will establish and implement procedures for the day-to-day instruction, including but not limited to procedures for curriculum and instruction, classroom management, discipline, faculty and staff evaluation, testing, parental communication, and professional development. The Director of Operations will conduct data analysis and oversee non-instructional support services, community outreach, facilities and internal financial controls, etc.

The Director of Academics and the Director of Operations will deliver information from their departments to the Executive Director/Head of Schools and create collaborative strategies for advancing ECS. These strategies will be shared with the entire staff and other constituents and key stakeholders for suggestions, comments and additional ideas.

Empower strives to ensure students have ample support to reach their academic, social, and emotional goals. The instructional staff to student ratio over the 5 year term ranges from 11.6 to 12.3:1 with an average of 12.1:1. The adult to student ratio ranges from 9.2 to 10.0:1 with an average of 9.61:1.

Attachments

Section 23: Staff Structure

23.1 [Attachment 21: Staffing Chart](#)

Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 2:11 PM

PDF / 146.832 KB

24. Staffing Plans, Hiring, Management, and Evaluation

Empower Community School employees will receive an annual employment contract, which outlines their terms of employment, annual pay, supervisor and job description. This contract will be eligible to be renewed every year and represents the defined expectations between ECS and the employee.

Empower Community School plans to pay competitive that will be at or above the state salary scale and may be higher in the event the local salary scales are materially higher than the state scale.

Empower Community School will focus on hiring the most mission aligned and culturally competent staff available. Particular attention will be given to diversity, vision and purpose, dedication to individualized learning, and the use of technology in the classroom. ECS plans to recruit such staff by using the internet and social media to advertise available positions and draw on its vast network of educators. All available efforts will be made to encourage any local educators who are interested in available positions at ECS to apply.

The interview process will have multiple steps. First, interested applicants will complete an application and provide a resume and any college and graduate level transcripts. Applicants will be encouraged to submit the application online and upload a resume. Second, following a review of applicants, qualified

candidates will receive a phone interview to determine their fit within the ECS mission, vision, and purpose. Third, an in-person interview will be scheduled where the candidate will prepare a lesson plan based on a "typical day" at ECS and its curriculum. Fourth, top candidates will then be screened for background checks and reference checks in accordance with Alabama state law for educators. The Executive Director/Head of School and the Director of Academics will be responsible for managing the interview process. The final decision on hiring will be based upon the recommendation of the Executive Director/Head of School and approved by the ECS Board of Directors. It is anticipated if Community School receives its Charter, it will immediately begin the process of recruiting interested teaching staff.

Empower Community School shall comply with all applicable federal laws, rules, and regulations regarding the qualifications of teachers and other instructional staff. ECS acknowledges that, after

approval, ECS teachers shall be exempt from state teacher certification requirements. Furthermore, the ECS acknowledges that the approaches to earning Alabama Educator and/or Leadership Certification shall be the same as those for individuals in the public local education agencies in Alabama.

Empower Community School acknowledges an understanding of the ALSDE, Educator Certification Section, and criminal background check process. ECS agrees to comply with this process and will implement the necessary steps to ensure such compliance. Furthermore, ECS shall be subject to the same civil rights, health, and safety requirements, including, but not limited to, state and local public health and building codes, employee fingerprinting, and critical background checks applicable to other public schools in the state, except as otherwise specifically provided for in the Act.

Hiring and Dismissing Personnel

Empower Community School will follow the following hiring procedures for school personnel:

1. Advertise position for a minimum of five business days,
2. Follow the interview process as outlined above,
3. Select most qualified applicant(s) and make offer of employment, and
4. Enter into an employment contract and provide orientation to new employees.

Empower Community School will implement a progressive discipline policy while attempting to educate the employee simultaneously. This policy, which will be incorporated into employment materials at a later date, will follow the following dismissal procedures:

1. Verbal Warning. A Verbal Warning will be used in situations involving minor infractions or early signs of poor work performance. Multiple Verbal Warnings may be used in situations where the conduct is of a minor nature. For major issues/infractions, Verbal Warnings may not be appropriate.
2. Written Warning. A Written Warning will be used in situations involving repeated minor infractions following the use of Verbal Warnings, or for more serious infractions. For major issues/infractions, Written Warnings may not be appropriate.
3. Performance Improvement Plan / Final Warning. A Performance Improvement Plan and/or Final Warning may be used in situations of repeated minor infractions or for more serious and major infractions. This step will incorporate the Principal / Head of School and applicable supervisors in determining a course of action to improve the employee's work performance by a certain date. If proper improvement has not been made by date certain, termination may be recommended. A Performance Improvement Plan / Final Warning may not be appropriate for major issues/infractions.
4. Suspension. Suspension may be used for repeated minor infractions or for more serious and major infractions. Suspensions may be in length up to 14 days.
5. Termination. Termination may be used in situations of repeated minor infractions or for more serious and major infractions. The Principal / Head of School will make the decision on termination of the employee after consulting with the employee, supervisors and other interested parties. An employee terminated will have the right to appeal to the ECS Board of Directors to have the termination overturned.

Teacher/Employee Manual

The Head of School, in collaboration with the Director(s) of Academics and Director of Operations, will develop the staff/employee handbook based on research. The handbook will include professional standards, policies, and practices for academics, operations, and finances. Upon approval of the governing board, the handbook will become an official document of the school.

Staff members will acknowledge receipt of the handbook upon hiring and be trained on its components during summer institute.

Empower's Support for School Leaders

Empower Community School's leadership team will be coached, supported, and evaluated in a number of ways. The Director of Academics and the Director of Operations will be coached and evaluated on a regular and consistent schedule by the Executive Director/Head of School. Regular formative feedback will be provided through weekly check-ins and joint observations. The Director of Academics and the Director of Operations will be formally evaluated twice a year by the Executive Director/Head of School.

The ECS Board of Directors will conduct a formal evaluation of the Executive Director/Head of School every Spring. An Executive Director Support/Evaluation committee will be formed that will be charged with creating or adopting a comprehensive evaluation tool that encompasses feedback from board members, staff, parents, leadership team members, students, and a third-party consultant to ensure ECS has a highly effective leader.

The school administrators will also apply for fellowships and participate in networks for school leaders that support their continuing development and provide support during the planning year and early years

of the school. Anthony Oliver is currently applying for a grant from the New Schools Venture Fund for innovative schools.

Empower's Support for Educators

Once onboarded, the faculty has the support of robust professional development bolstered by internal staff expertise, external partnerships with selected educational providers, and instructional resources.

This professional development is embedded into the daily schedule of the school through a common planning block. Faculty members will have access to a number of best-in-class programs, including local and state conferences and programming offered by local partners.

Within the staffing model are key positions whose roles are to support the professional development of teachers through coaching and collaboration. This curriculum leadership team will facilitate collaboration around evaluating student work and data through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), planning curriculum, learning to use assessment data to inform instruction, and sharing best teaching practices across the school. This team will consist of the Director of Academics and Elementary and Middle School Specialists. This support system will provide teachers with instructional support.

With respect to supervision and evaluation of the instructional staff, ECS will adopt tools and procedures that allow our leadership team to give teachers targeted and specific feedback on their teaching so that each teacher realizes his or her full potential. ECS will use the Danielson Framework for Teaching to evaluate instructional staff. In the past 25 years, the Danielson Framework has been used by over 1500 organizations in 49 states and is widely accepted as an effective tool to improve teaching and learning.^[1]

Educator Performance and Staff Turnover

The students at Empower Community School deserve a high-quality education to prepare them to be successful in college and careers. This challenging work requires the collective efforts and

commitment of all educators, including the principal, teachers and operations staff members, families and community members. Educators are driven by the conviction that all students can succeed and understand the tremendous responsibility to dramatically improve student outcomes. ECS will act in the best interests of the students and understands that, unfortunately, there will be occasions where there is unsatisfactory instructional leadership/administrator or educator performance. In such situations where there is unsatisfactory performance, a performance improvement plan will be created. The Executive Director/Head of School and Director of Academics will be responsible for implementing a corrective plan. The plan will be based on the data driven approaches and proven best practices. Plans could include school-wide plans, grade level corrective plans, and subject area and/or individual teacher corrective plans. Each plan will be prescriptive based on the needs.

Corrective actions could include:

- Termination
- Placement on a School Improvement Plan
- Mentor teacher provided for additional support
- On-going professional development

Empower Community School understands there will also be changes and turnover with educators and administrators. To address this obvious concern, ECS will look to build leaders and administrators from within its educator ranks. ECS will work to ensure decision making is shared throughout the educator ranks with the use of a Instructional Leadership Team. Additionally, ECS will focus on hiring from within and creating additional leadership roles, when possible, to reward deserving and promising educators. Promising educators will be given multiple opportunities to observe, participate and lead activities to better prepare them for administrative positions. ECS will also constantly work with its educators in professional development and career building exercises to address the educator's goals and needs in an effort to provide the educator self-fulfillment and growth. Through this multi-faceted approach, the ECS hopes to address the concerns with unsatisfactory instructional leadership/administrator or educator performance, as well as instructional leadership, administrator, and/or educator changes and turnover.

[1] The Danielson Group. Retrieved from www.danielsongroup.org. 2 March 2021

Attachments

Section 24: Staffing Plans, Hiring, Management, and Evaluation

24.1	Attachment 22- Employee Handbook	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/17/21 3:21 PM	PDF / 65.647 KB
24.2	Attachment 24-Educator Evaluation Tool	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 2:23 PM	PDF / 482.082 KB
24.3	Attachment 23B-School Leader Evaluation Tool	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 2:22 PM	PDF / 1.319 MB
24.4	Attachment 23A- Head of School Evaluation Tool	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 2:21 PM	PDF / 583.497 KB

25. Professional Development

The person/position responsible for planning, monitoring, and implementing professional development will be the Director of Academics. However, other members of the school leadership team will collaborate with the Director of Academics to implement portions of the training.

Empower's professional development program is centered on the belief that we want our educators to have the same opportunities as our students. Our program is designed to ensure that each educator has a personalized plan for professional growth, the opportunity to work with other educators with similar goals, and the social and emotional support to execute their job at a high level. While there are several trainings and professional development sessions that all educators will participate in, educators will have the opportunity to create their own professional development action plan. Empower will use the PowerSchool LMS to keep track of all educator PD. This will ensure that educators have the necessary course hours to obtain and/or renew their educator certifications. The following sections detail the professional development for teachers, including whether the PD is provided internally or externally.

Uniform Professional Development Sessions

Response to Intervention and Universal Design for Learning (Internal)

Researcher John Hattie has found that RTI has a 1.29 effect size on student learning. The hinge point for student learning rests at an effect size of 0.4.[1] The UDL framework outlines the principles needed to ensure that instruction is designed to include the unique learning and behavior supports, including technology, of all students.[2] Teachers will learn the foundational principles of both frameworks and connect their learnings to successfully implement the individualized instruction and targeted intervention components of the school model. This training is the foundation of the Empower instructional model and will frequently be revisited throughout the school year during professional learning communities.

Data Driven Instruction (Internal)

Based on Paul Brambrick-Santoyo's *Driven By Data: A Practical Guild to Improve Instruction*, the data driven instruction model prepares teachers to use formative and assessment data to plan effective lessons, reteach unlearned content, and individualize learning for students. The data collected and analyzed through this process will support student individualized learning plans.

Student Supports: Special Services (Internal)

This session outlines the student supports available to students, including but not limited to, special education, mental health support, counseling services, and ELL services. Teachers will understand the process for referrals, implementation, and monitoring of student services while planning for daily classroom implementation of strategies for student learning. The information in this session will prepare teachers to write, support, and monitor individual learning plans.

Proactive Approaches for School Culture and Restorative Practices (External)

The foundation of our school culture, this session prepares educators to use proactive strategies to build relationships with students and create a positive culture inside and outside of their classroom. We will also learn, internalize, and practice restorative practices for student behavior. The concepts support the comprehensive social and emotional development for all students.

Purpose Prep: Educator SEL Program (External/Online)

Based on the CASEL framework, this session is designed to help educators develop their own social and emotional skills. Consisting of 3 levels that can be completed in approximately 20 hours, this online course allows educators to obtain a certificate of completion for each session and ultimately receive a Certified SEL Coach Certification.

Purpose Prep: Student SEL Program (External)

After completing the online SEL certification, educators will be trained on how to implement the Purpose Prep curriculum with students. A foundational part of our comprehensive social and emotional program for students, all Empower Staff members are required to complete both the Educator and Student SEL program trainings.

Team Based Professional Development Sessions

Collaborative Planning Time: The Professional Learning Community (Internal)

Teachers will participate in 3 60-minute PLC sessions weekly. PLC meetings will consist of training and planning for data driven instruction, individualized learning, social and emotional supports for students, and other components to support educator growth. Under the guidance and support of the Director of Academics, PLC sessions will be led by teacher leaders and/or members of the instructional leadership team.

Book Study: The Power of Teacher Teams (Internal)

During the first semester, teacher teams will complete a book study on *The Power of Teacher Teams* by Vivian Troen and Katherine Boles. Teachers will learn to distribute leadership, have difficult conversations, and collaboratively plan to for student success.

Instructional Rounds (Internal)[3]

Teachers and leaders at Empower will also conduct instructional rounds across the entire school. The data ascertained from instructional rounds will be used to determine next steps for whole staff professional development. The steps of the instructional rounds process are as follows:

1. Identification of a problem of practice
2. Observation of the practice
3. Debriefing- identifying patterns and wonderings
4. Brainstorming next level of work

The instructional round process is not only designed to identify problems of practice and plan for improvement. It simultaneously prepares teachers to be active participants in the instructional leadership of the school.

Individualized Professional Development Sessions

ASCD Activate Professional Development Library (External/Online)

The ASCD Activate portal contains readings, supporting videos, action plan templates, and courses to support educator growth in 9 distinct pathways. Each pathway contains over 50 readings and videos for educators to develop specific skills to grow professionally while supporting student learning. In collaboration with their instructional coach, educators will be able to select a

distinct pathway to reach their goals. Each educator will be able to take 2 courses each year for free. The Activate pathways are:

- Classroom Management
- Curriculum & Lesson Design
- DI & Personalization
- Distance Learning
- Educator Wellness
- English Language Learners
- Leading for Equity
- Social-Emotional Learning
- Special Education and Inclusion

Week 1: Working Together at Empower

Monday	Staff Introductions Compass Points Activity Roles and Responsibilities Team Building Activity 1 Community Bus Tour
Tuesday	Team Building Activity 2 HR Policies and Procedures The Power of Teacher Teams Introduction Intro to PLC: Case Study Analysis
Wednesday	Team Building Activity 3 Educator SEL Training (Self-Paced) Educator Mental Health Supports

Thursday	<p>Team Building Activity 4</p> <p>Mock Instructional Rounds</p>
Friday	<p>Team Building Activity 5</p> <p>Energy Leadership</p> <p>A Day in the Life: Systems and Structures to Support Student Success</p> <p>Parent and Community Roundtable</p>

Week 2: The Empower Instructional Model: Supporting Learning for All Students

Monday	<p>Team Building Activity 6</p> <p>Response to Intervention and Universal Design for Learning</p>
Tuesday	<p>Team Building Activity 7</p> <p>Proactive Approaches for School Culture and Restorative Practices</p>
Wednesday	<p>Team Building Activity 8</p> <p>Proactive Approaches for School Culture and Restorative Practices</p> <p>School Culture Scavenger Hunt</p>
Thursday	<p>Team Building Activity 9</p> <p>Purpose Prep: Student SEL Program</p>
Friday	<p>Team Building Activity 10</p> <p>Student Support Services</p>

Week 3: Putting It All Together: Effective Planning for Day 1

Monday	Team Building Activity 11 Individual Learning Plans for Students
Tuesday	Team Building Activity 12 Mentoring and Advisory
Wednesday	Team Building Activity 13 PLC: Creating a Common Instructional Culture
Thursday	Team Building Activity 14 Classroom Preparation
Friday	Team Building Activity 15 Classroom Preparation

ECS faculty will receive on-going professional development that is necessary to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of its students. Faculty will first participate in a 15-day Summer Institute, and participate in over 3 hours of weekly professional development and collaborative planning time. Faculty will also have 6 full days of professional development throughout. They are encouraged to participate in state and national educational conferences that focus on content, instruction, and technology strengthening. Faculty are expected to integrate what they have learned during professional development training into their lesson plans and instructional practices; this will be evaluated through lesson plan reviews and routine classroom observations.

[1] J. Hattie (December 2017) visiblelearningplus.com

[2] Basham, J.; Isaael, M.; Graden, J.; Poth, R.; Winston, M. A Comprehensive Approach to RTI: Embedding Universal Design For Learning and Technology. *Learning Disability Quaterly*. Fall 2010. Volume 33. Issue 4.

[3] City, Elizabeth; Elmore, Richard; Tietel, Lee; *Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning*. Harvard Education Press. 2009

Attachments

Section 25: Professional Development

– No Attachments –

26. Performance Management

Mission Specific School and Organizational Goals

Academic Achievement: At the end of every school year, Empower Community School will have an annual increase in student proficiency of no less than 5% in both reading and math as determined by the Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program.

Academic Growth: At the end of every school, Empower Community School students will be at or above the state average for growth in reading and math as determined by the Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program.

Attendance: At the end of every school year, Empower Community School will have a daily attendance rate of 90% or greater.

Social and Emotional Learning: At the end of every school year, Empower Community School students will score an average of 3.5 out of 5 on the Panorama SEL Skills and Competencies Survey.

Parent Involvement: Annually, 90% of parents will participate in at least 2 student led conferences and complete 2 school surveys.

Staff Satisfaction: Annually, 75% of staff will report experiencing a positive school climate on the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports School Climate Survey.

Empower's Comprehensive Assessment Program

A comprehensive approach to assessment drives all components of the school's instructional program. Research-based measures implemented at strategic intervals throughout the school year allow for close monitoring of student progress and frequent evaluation of instructional resources and strategies. Components of the assessment program (with potential assessment resources noted) include:

- Universal screener/benchmark assessment
 - NWEA's Measures of Academic Progress (K-8)
 - Dibels 8th Edition
- Diagnostic assessments
 - Decoding surveys
 - High-frequency word inventory
 - Running records
- Formative/progress monitoring (included in math and literacy curriculum suite)
 - Common formative assessments
 - Math: Into Math K-8 Formative Assessments
 - Literacy: myView and myPerspectives Formative Assessments
- Interim assessments
 - NWEA's Measures of Academic Progress (K-8)
- Summative assessments
 - Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program (ACAP)

"Communities of practice" among teachers and administrators leverage data collected from these measures to inform instructional decision. Empower will use DuFour and Eaker's Professional Learning Communities model during daily professional development time to "work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the

students they serve” (Dufour et. al, 2010). In addition to these assessments, students will be assessed utilizing rubrics and portfolios.

Measuring and Evaluating Student Progress

Empower will use a comprehensive assessment system to measure and evaluate academic progress of individual students, student cohorts, and the school as a whole throughout the school year, at the end of each academic year, and for the term of the charter contract. Empower will identify an appropriate tool to house data from the formative and summative assessments administered. The platform will allow for teachers, students, and parents to have access to assessment data in real time. Empower will seek a tool that provides an easy-to-use dashboard, which provides a holistic picture of an individual child, class, cohort, or of the entire school.

Data at Empower will be accessible and readily available to teachers. Through Professional Learning Communities teachers will meet weekly to analyze reports on student progress through formative assessment data. In PLC meetings teachers may develop an assessment, review the results of an assessment, and make decisions about instruction or grouping strategies based on student needs. In accordance with RtI, progress-monitoring data will be tracked, analyzed and shared with the Problem-Solving Team as students move through the tiers of RtI.

The Head of School and Director of Academics will be responsible for managing school-wide assessment data. Reports for school-wide data will be presented to the board and the community after school-wide benchmarks. Reports will provide snapshots as well as growth over time throughout an academic year or across academic years over the term of the charter. The Elementary and Middle School Specialists will be responsible for analyzing and aggregating grade level data to facilitate PLC discussions. Teachers will be responsible for managing classroom assessment data and communicating regular progress to parents. Standards-based reports compiling the variety of formative assessments will be provided to parents quarterly. Two parent conference days and the ability for parents and teachers to schedule conferences throughout the year will provide open and frequent communication regarding academic progress.

The Director of Academics will be responsible for managing academic data and coordinating the development of educators in interpreting and managing data for students. The Director of Academics will facilitate the professional development of the Specialists to analyze data so that they will be equipped to lead grade-level PLC teams. It is important at Empower that data is accessible and responsibility for student data is shared among staff. A data governance policy will be developed to guide the protection of information about students in compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). All staff will be trained on the data governance policy

Teachers will be trained in analyzing, interpreting, and using performance data specific to the assessment tools that are selected. The data wise process provides a structure from which leadership, coaches, and academic integration specialists are able to work through specific needs of students and provide responsive interventions based on the need. This process will provide a framework from which teachers will review and analyze performance data on a regular basis. (<https://datawise.gse.harvard.edu/>)

Professional Learning Communities at Work training will provide school leadership and educators with protocols and frameworks for analyzing, interpreting, and using performance data to improve student learning.

Empower Community School is committed to continuous improvement. The Empower improvement process involves every area of the school model. Through the performance management goals listed above regular check-ins towards goals and improvement will help to

inform progress and set new goals when goals have been reached. Empower will develop a culture around evolution and growth- where all staff are committed to improving outcomes for students.

The AdvancED Continuous Improvement System provides a framework to guide Empower as it grows and changes. A clear set of student, classroom, and school-wide goals will be developed based on the internal and external performance management systems outlined. Empower staff will continuously collect and analyze data from a range of sources to make decisions about student learning and create continuous improvement plans annually.

The Head of School and the Director of Academics will monitor and communicate aggregated information about student learning, the progress toward improvement goals, and the achievement of goals. They will facilitate quarterly team meetings to review the goals that were identified, what interventions were put in place to meet the goals, and what progress has been made toward goals. If goals were not met by the intended date the faculty and staff will develop an improvement plan to be implemented with specific timelines and persons responsible. These goals will become a priority for the upcoming quarter.

If Empower falls short of academic goals, the Head of Schools and Director of Academics will be responsible for implementing a correction plan which will be based on the data that illustrates which goals have not been reached. The plans could be for a specific grade level, subject area, or for individual teachers and students. The plan could also be for a schoolwide improvement process.

Teacher corrective actions could include:

- Targeted professional development
- Mentor teacher provided for additional support
- Teacher-Administrator/Coach Conference Schedule
- Termination

Grade level corrective actions could include:

- Additional coaching support
- Grade-level/Administrator/Coach Conference Schedule
- Targeted professional development

School-wide corrective actions could include:

- Targeted Professional Development
- Additional Coaching Support
- Placement on a School Improvement Plan

Student corrective actions could include:

- Additional Tutoring
- Classroom Reassignment
- Referral to PST Team
- Referral to Outside Resources

Attachments

Section 26: Performance Management

– No Attachments –

27. Facilities

The two proposed facilities to operate Empower Community School grades Pre-K – 8 are St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, located at 2410 7th Ave North, Bessemer, AL 35020, and St. Aloysius School, 751 Academy Drive #A, Bessemer, AL 35022. Both facilities once operated as schools but are no longer being utilized or operated as a school or other educational programming.

The St. Francis Assisi Catholic Church facility is approximately 13,000 sq. ft. with eight (8) classrooms, cafetorium/gymnasium, office spaces, meeting spaces and a kitchen. The school section of the church has been closed for several years and will require renovations prior to occupying. An architectural firm has been hired to complete an assessment and to develop plans for renovations and space optimization. Thus, Empower Community School will be prepared to comply with applicable state, local and authorizer health and safety requirements, as well as follow applicable city planning review procedures.

The St. Aloysius School facility is approximately 34,000 sq. ft. with ten (10) classrooms, a gymnasium with an upstairs classroom, library/media center, computer room, lunchroom and kitchen, front office suite and teacher’s lounge, as well as outdoor playground and plenty of outdoor field space. This location recently closed its school and should not require renovations, but rather minor improvements/upgrades.

The following documents are being provided (**Attachment 25**) as evidence of the commitment of the two facilities:

1. Letters of Intent for St. Francis Assisi Catholic Church and St. Aloysius School
2. Lease Intent letter from the Bishop of the Diocese
3. Draft of proposed lease agreement for St. Francis Assisi Church and St. Aloysius School

Attachments

Section 27: Facilities

27.1	Attachment 26- Facilities Description	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/17/21 3:39 PM	PDF / 1.202 MB
27.2	Attachment 25-Proof of Facility Commitment	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 2:32 PM	PDF / 1.195 MB

28. Start-Up and Ongoing Operations

Empower Community School has been planning this school for more than a year and will have nearly two years of total time to organize and execute its startup plan, as well as the resources of

New Schools for Alabama (NSFA) and its functional partners, and the capacity of New Schools Venture Fund (NSVF) to draw from as it continues its startup activities. A comprehensive list of start-up activities can be found in Attachment 27.

Identifying a facility location has been done, a founding Head of School has been hired, a full back-office support function has been arranged (see finance plan), a transportation and nutrition services plan has been identified, and safety plans and training are being developed with the assumption the COVID-19 situation will remain. Empower has also been in constant communication with Bessemer Redevelopment Corporation as a potential partner in shared efforts to build and improve the community.

National and statewide partners NSVF and NSFA further support Empower Community School and other new charter schools in Alabama by providing best practice startup examples, document tools, facilitating site visits to charter schools, and connecting founders and board members with key functional advisors whether it be leadership development, academics, finance, operations, or governance needs. NSVF has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in new schools over the last twenty years and is an exceedingly careful investor, choosing schools it feels have strong leadership, and the ability to innovate in support of new schools, ideas, and models that support equity in education. NSFA is organizing both financial support (\$1.5 in competitive grants) to Alabama charter schools and technical assistance specifically targeted to startup and ongoing operations. Anthony Oliver has been selected by NSFA for a \$180k leadership development grant, and if approved as a charter school will be eligible to receive a \$1.5 million startup grant. Other fundraising activities are underway but having these financial resources at this stage of development will further support a strong startup and ongoing operations function.

School Safety and Security

The safety and security of the students, faculty, staff, and visitors at Empower Community School is of the utmost importance. At the beginning of each year and upon the return each January, ECS will have mandatory safety-training meetings for all employees and these will be constantly updated and revised. Given the school anticipates opening in what could still be a COVID-19 environment very specific planning has already been done to ensure that proper screens occur either daily or weekly (temperature checks, questionnaires, and staff observation of students) and additional distancing is arranged at events like breakfast and lunch, plans for how to temporarily quarantine students who exhibit symptoms, and an extensive daily cleaning routine will be part of the common staff training. In a COVID-19 environment all staff and students will be trained on social distancing, handwashing, how to limit face touching, and how to sanitize hands (staff and students) and various surfaces (staff), etc. ECS anticipates expanding its annual safety and security meeting to include extensive training on how students and staff will arrive, learn, depart, and interact in ways that limit potential exposure. At this meeting, ECS administration will discuss crisis and emergency plans and go in depth with different situations that may arise. In addition to the meeting and ongoing discussions, ECS substitutes will be required to have access to the school safety information and specific procedures upon arrival.

All non-students or non-staff members who visit the school will be screened by a school security system known as Raptor Visitor Management System. The Raptor school security system is in place in thousands of schools, both district and charter, and helps to quickly screen individuals who are not allowed in the school (e.g., sex offenders) and will help to manage custody issues, organize volunteers, and respond to emergencies. The Raptor system will have faculty's numbers and information stored. In the case of an emergency, the system sends each member of ECS staff an email, text, and phone call notifying them of the situation. In addition to Raptor, cameras can be located throughout the school in various areas and on buses. School officials will have access to monitor the cameras, if needed.

Throughout the year, Empower Community School will make certain all exit doors remain locked and the front door has controlled access. ECS will require that all guests use the main entrance of the building. Upon arrival, guests must sign in, Empower Community School will utilize the Raptor Visitor Management System before approving entry by a guest. After a completed scan by Raptor, the guest will receive a visitor pass to be worn for the duration of their visit. To exit, the guest must sign out at the front office and return their visitor pass.

Empower Community School plans to use a fully executed crisis and emergency plan to handle situations that may arise. ECS will work with the local emergency responders to revise crisis and emergency plans and procedures on a reoccurring basis throughout the school year. ECS will work closely with the local police and fire departments throughout the year to develop a plan for an active shooter situation, conduct bi-annual test of the fire hydrants near the school, schedule walk-throughs of our campus and participate in drills. Drills and emergency plans are kept up to date for emergency responders to access. In addition to the crisis and emergency plan, monthly fire and weather safety drills will be performed. After completion of the drills, employees at Empower Community School will reflect on the drills and discuss solutions to any issues that may arise. A map of the school and the drills will be posted in every classroom. Empower Community School is committed to working with the local emergency response agencies to keep our school safe.

Student safety begins with the location of the student. Teachers will have an electronic attendance count that must be submitted with each class and revised throughout the day – as required by Alabama law. Morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up procedures will be developed and implemented by the Director of Operations with consultation with local law enforcement officials.

Empower Community School plans to implement a student safety seminar at the beginning of each semester. During this time, ECS will teach students the importance of safety when using the worldwide web or social media platforms. The issue of cyber bullying will also be discussed. Bullying forms will be posted on our website, the counselor’s office and the main office for any student that may need it. See Complaint report form attached.

Comprehensive Insurance

Empower Community School will have a comprehensive set of insurance policies that include workers compensation, general liability, umbrella, directors and officers, employee practices liability, and vehicle coverage (see Attachment 29). These coverages will align to the state required limits and will be in place prior to launch of the school.

Transportation and Other Operational Services

A detailed plan for transportation and other operational services, including food service, is included in Attachment 30.

Attachments

Section 28: Start-Up and Ongoing Operations

28.1	Attachment 29-Proposed Insurance Coverage (Second Upload)	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/17/21 3:44 PM	PDF / 153.731 KB
28.2	Attachment 28-Startup Budget	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/17/21 3:44 PM	XLSX / 12.089 KB

28.3	Attachment 30 - Transportation and Other Operational Plans	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 6:23 PM	PDF / 103.512 KB
28.4	Attachment 27-Startup Plan	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 5:59 PM	PDF / 151.218 KB
28.5	Attachment 29- Proposed Insurance Coverages	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 2:46 PM	PDF / 153.731 KB

Notes

Anthony Oliver, 3/17/21 6:37 PM:

There are two documents labeled Attachment 30. The appropriate one for this section is an excel sheet labeled Attachment 30: Transportation and Other Operational Plans

29. Operations Capacity

Empower Community School's applicant team includes a blend of local leaders dedicated to providing an additional education option in Bessemer, as well as additional capacity from NSFA's best in class technical assistance and back office providers. The combination of a strong founding staff, a diverse board of directors, and key outsource support from NSFA and its partners gives ECS the depth and breadth required to successfully ensure strong operations capacity. The board of the school is already in place and is described in the governance section. It includes members with backgrounds in finance, marketing, law, federal programming, fundraising, philanthropy, real-estate, project and construction management, K- 12 school experience, and community building.

Additionally, ECS has partnered with New Schools for Alabama for additional operations capacity. NSFA provides CFO/COO level technical assistance to their partner schools and also arranges additional providers for essential services. ECS will be utilizing NSFA's carefully selected foodservice, back-office, and facilities providers to ensure capable startup and operations functions occur in critical areas. All of these providers are best in class and have been supporting and advising charter schools for ten or more years. LBMC W Squared is the back-office provider and provides a cloud-based accounting, internal control, purchasing, cash management, financial reporting, payroll, benefits, and HR function for the school. LBMC W Squared is a large regional accounting firm with extraordinary capacity and a niche in serving charter schools. NSFA's CFO/COO support provides senior leadership and advisory support that small schools are rarely able to access on their own and works with the board and leadership on annual budgeting, startup and operations, facilities financing, and strategic planning. NSFA also has access to SchoolPrint, a nonprofit facilities advisory program that provides guidance and support to charter schools who are developing or renovating facilities. SchoolPrint is a philanthropic program of the Local Initiatives Support Company (LISC) and supports schools with essential facilities related technical assistance such as architectural, design, building codes, general contractor bidding processes, and owners rep services, among others.

Key partners that bring operations capacity include NSFA's technical assistance team led by Chris Reynolds (a former charter leader with experience starting up and running ten schools in four states, including major school facilities renovation projects), the foodservice advisory firm School Food Wellness Group, the back-office accounting provider, LBMC W Squared, and additional support for federal programs, and technology partners, and strategic planning. Additionally, ECS

has access to LISC’s program of philanthropic facilities support to charter schools. This program assesses charter school finances and their development capacity, and then connect them to pre-qualified organizations that can support their plans for new or expanded school facilities.

Specific facility projects that NSFA has led or been part of include advising on lease and building renovations and district partnerships in Little Rock, AR as well as the design, development, financing and renovation of over 500,000 square feet of public school facilities in Michigan, Illinois, Texas, and Tennessee. These include district buildings, modular campuses, bank financing, capital projects, and New Market Tax Credit financing. We are confident that NSFA has more than adequate expertise to help us develop and finance a facility in Bessemer City.

Additionally, Troy Williams with TJ3 Consulting, LLC. Is a member of the applicant team. Troy is the former Chief Operations Officer with Birmingham City Schools, where he oversaw all district operations, including facilities, maintenance, food services, transportation, safety and security, technology and athletics. Troy is able to provide valuable support from his extensive operations experience with urban school districts, but also from his district and charter school start up work during his time as Senior Director of Operations and Chief Operations Officer with the Tennessee Achievement School district. Part of Troy’s role with the Tennessee Achievement School District not only included overseeing day-to-day school operations with the direct-run schools, but also as coordinator and collaborator for Operations compliance and support services with the charter organizations that were authorized to operate the neighborhood schools.

Attachments

Section 29: Operations Capacity

– No Attachments –

30. Unique/Innovative Operational Aspects

N/A

Attachments

Section 30: Unique/Innovative Operational Aspects

– No Attachments –

FINANCIAL PLAN AND CAPACITY

31. Financial Plan

Financial Systems, Processes and Controls

Empower has selected NSFA's back office outsource solution to ensure a strong financial planning, accounting, purchasing, and payroll function for the school. Outsourcing to a skilled provider ensures proper accounting procedures, state reporting, and compliance are in place as well as appropriate levels of internal control as well as best in class cloud-based software and reporting functionality (IntAcct). Responsibility for accounts payable, payroll, benefits, taxes, purchasing, monthly financial statements, bank reconciliations, etc. will be provided by New Schools for Alabama's back-office provider LBMC W Squared. This firm services charter schools in several states and understands the unique aspects of local, state, and federal reporting. They have clients that are less than a million dollars in revenue to clients with hundreds of millions in annual revenues and have been in business for over 15 years. They have a team that provides support to clients that includes, CPAs, controllers, and full A/P, payroll, and benefits staff. Costs for this service are included in the budget (\$40-80k annually based on enrollment) and allow the director of operations and school founder to leverage a strong finance function from the outset.

The Dir. of Operations is the primary financial leader charged with collaborating with outsource providers and liaises with the board to ensure strong financial controls and reporting. With approvals of major expenses coming from the Principal and board, this structure ensures a strong internal control environment.

This structure, in collaboration with the Principal ensures a strong system exists to create an annual budget, financial forecasts, and related analyses to support the accounting and finance function of the school. Key systems (payroll, benefits, bank reconciliations, etc.) are all provided via outsource, and include a system for approvals, POs, purchasing utilize an outsource accounting provider to ensure effective and accurate data and reporting. All financial related approvals, such as the annual budget, executive compensation, vendor contracts (audit firm, for ex.), etc., will be approved at regularly scheduled board meetings of the school. Annual and monthly reporting will be uploaded to the state system on a recurring cycle and NSFA's outsource partners are already developing those systems on behalf of other Alabama charters.

Empower's applicant team includes a blend of local leaders dedicated to providing an additional education option in the Bessemer area as well as additional capacity from NSFA's best in class technical assistance and back -office providers. The combination of a strong founding staff, a diverse board of directors, and key outsource support from NSFA and its partners gives Empower the depth and breadth required to successfully ensure strong finance and operations capacity. The board of the school is already in place and is described in the governance section. It includes members with backgrounds in accounting and finance, nonprofit management, local business leaders, etc.

Key partners that bring operations capacity include NSFA's technical assistance team led by Chris Reynolds (a former charter leader with experience starting up and running ten schools in four states, including major school facilities renovation projects), the foodservice advisory firm School Food Wellness Group, the back-office accounting provider, LBMC W Squared, and additional support for federal programs, and technology partners, and strategic planning.

Financial Roles and Responsibilities

Upon approval, a thorough review of existing policies will be conducted to determine what changes may be necessary to ensure compliance with the Alabama code and to ensure effective procedures are implemented for vendor approval, purchasing, payables, cash management, bank authorizations, and other financial management systems.

Empower’s board will review interim financial statements and approve a budget annually by a set date. The principal and director of operations shall have responsibility for preparing and adhering to an annual budget as approved by the board of directors. The outsource accounting firm will support budget production by maintaining careful monthly financials and reporting and analytical support as leadership develops the annual budget.

The board’s role is to be ultimately responsible for the financial administration of the school and the director of operations and principal are responsible for implementing the financial function timely and accurately and with appropriate transparency as required of a public school. The school will avoid hiring and developing an inhouse accounting team by utilizing an outsource accounting firm for full payroll, general ledger, and monthly financial statement preparation.

Each year, the board shall approve an audit by an independent accounting firm and provide it to the public, the LEA, and the state of Alabama. This audit will be posted on the school’s website along with the annual form 990 report. The process by which an audit firm is selected will include an RFP for an annual financial audit (GAAP) and also any necessary government accounting reports. LBMC W Squared will not bid on this work as they are the outsource firm and will instead assist in preparing the bid request form and evaluating for the board the various audit bids that are received.

Each year, Empower will adopt an annual budget in an open public meeting. Copies of the approved budget and prior year audited financial statements and Form 990s will be made freely available online. In accordance with open meetings laws in Alabama, all meetings of the board will be open to the public and appropriate notices published on the website.

Contracted Services

As mentioned earlier, the school will outsource its accounting, payroll, and financial function as well as engaging a CPA firm each year for auditing services. Costs for these services are included in the budget and range from \$52-\$65k annually. Audits are budgeted at \$10-\$12k, and the school has identified vendors for technology (\$30-50k), food service (10-15K), and federal programs (\$6-12k) support as well. Taken together the annual costs are approximately \$120 - \$150k and represent incredible capacity for much less than would be required if hired internally.

Insurance

The board will secure a typical set of insurance coverages to include liability, umbrella coverage, automobiles, employment practices, Directors and officers in amounts that are at or above the limits required under the charter law in Alabama.

Attachments

Section 31: Financial Plan

31.1	Attachment 30-Financial Plan Workbook	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 7:14 PM	XLSX / 91.136 KB
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31.2	Attachment 32-Evidence of Committed Funds	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 4:42 PM	PDF / 908.497 KB
31.3	Attachment 31-Budget Narrative	Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 4:29 PM	PDF / 155.757 KB

Notes

Anthony Oliver, 3/17/21 6:28 PM:

There are two documents labeled Attachment 30. The appropriate one for this section is an excel sheet labeled Attachment 30: Financial Workbook.

32. Financial Management Capacity

Empower Community School’s applicant team includes a blend of local leaders dedicated to providing an additional education option in Bessemer, as well as additional capacity from NSFA’s best in class technical assistance and back office providers. The combination of a strong founding staff, a diverse board of directors, and key outsource support from NSFA and its partners gives ECS the depth and breadth required to successfully ensure strong financial management capacity. The board of the school is already in place and is described in the governance section. It includes members with backgrounds in finance, marketing, law, federal programming, fundraising, philanthropy, real-estate, project and construction management, K- 12 school experience, and community building.

Additionally, ECS has partnered with New Schools for Alabama for additional financial management capacity. NSFA provides CFO/COO level technical assistance to their partner schools and also arranges additional providers for essential services. ECS will be utilizing NSFA’s carefully selected foodservice, back-office, and facilities providers to ensure capable startup and operations functions occur in critical areas. All of these providers are best in class and have been supporting and advising charter schools for ten or more years. LBMC W Squared is the back-office provider and provides a cloud-based accounting, internal control, purchasing, cash management, financial reporting, payroll, benefits, and HR function for the school. LBMC W Squared is a large regional accounting firm with extraordinary capacity and a niche in serving charter schools. NSFA’s CFO/COO support provides senior leadership and advisory support that small schools are rarely able to access on their own and works with the board and leadership on annual budgeting, startup and operations, facilities financing, and strategic planning.

Key partners that bring financial management capacity include NSFA’s technical assistance team led by Chris Reynolds (a former charter leader with experience starting up and running ten schools in four states, including major school facilities renovation projects. Additionally, ECS has access to LISC’s program of philanthropic facilities support to charter schools. This program assesses charter school finances and their development capacity, and then connect them to pre-qualified organizations that can support their plans for new or expanded school facilities.

Empower’s Board of Directors is comprised of individuals who have experience in accounting, business development, and school finances. Additionally, our school founder, Anthony Oliver, has extensive fundraising and school finance experience, including managing a \$1.5 million federal school improvement grant.

Attachments

Section 32: Financial Management Capacity

– No Attachments –

EXISTING OPERATORS

33. Existing Operators

N/A

Attachments

Section 33: Existing Operators

33.1 [N/A](#)

Oliver, Anthony J, 3/15/21 7:27 PM

DOCX / 58.402 KB

Recommendation

School Name:	Empower Community School
Primary Contact:	Anthony Oliver
Submission Date:	March 17, 2021
Recommendation Date:	May 18, 2021
Recommended By:	Logan Searcy
Charter Status:	Granted

No comments were provided by Logan Searcy