

LEA Plan for Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services

LEA Name: Empowerment Academy Charter School

Last Revised: June 2023

1. Maintaining Health and Safety

Per State request, for each “INSERT ILLNESS OR EMERGENCY” mitigation strategy listed below (A–H), we describe how Empowerment Academy plans to maintain the health and safety of students, educators, and other staff and the policies it adopted relating to the following safety recommendations established by the CDC.

A. Universal and correct wearing of masks

Per the Executive Order set forth by New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy, masks are optional for all students and staff members.

However, students and/or staff members may be required to wear a mask for 10 days per medical and CDC guidance in the event of exposure.

Free disposable masks are available for all students and staff members who request or require one.

B. Physical distancing (e.g., including use of cohorts/podding)

Physical distancing is optional per CDC guidance.

C. Handwashing and respiratory etiquette

Empowerment Academy encourages regular hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (or the length of singing the Alphabet song) prior to/following eating, sharing materials and use of district outdoor equipment to reduce the spread of COVID-19. If soap and water are not readily available, use of provided hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol is required.

Water fountain mouth pieces have been closed and water bottle filling stations have been installed in each location. Please ensure you send your child with a labeled refillable water bottle daily.

Teachers will ensure students hand wash or sanitize any time before or after they eat.

D. Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation

- Classrooms will be cleaned daily in accordance with internal checklists.
- Cafeterias will be cleaned daily in accordance with cleaning and disinfecting procedures. Bathrooms will be cleaned and disinfected during the operating day and once again after school closes for the day.
- Additional outside air will be introduced where possible by opening doors, windows, and installation of two-way fans.

E. Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, in collaboration with the State, local, territorial, or Tribal health departments

Contact tracing will not occur for purposes of isolation and quarantine.

School officials will continue to maintain close communication and meet with the local Department of Health on a regular basis in order to provide information and share resources with the staff and community on “ILLNESS NAME” transmission, prevention, and control. Students and employees with symptoms related to “ILLNESS NAME” or close contacts must be safely and respectfully isolated from others.

Our Head Nurse, Henrietta Johnson and Director of Education, Angela Thomas are the liaisons to the Department of Health. School nurses and Principals are continually consulted for building based issues relevant to cases and quarantines.

F. Diagnostic and screening testing

Parents who feel their children are sick should keep them home and contact a physician.

In the event of exposure and/or sickness due to “ILLNESS” , parents are asked to inform the school and follow quarantine guidelines (5 days). A positive test result is requested for information and quarantine follow through purposes. Students and/or staff members are permitted to return to school/work after the quarantine period.

“ILLNESS” tests if available (PCR or rapid) are acceptable forms of testing at Empowerment Academy. We will not accept self/home tests for neither positive nor negative results at this time.

G. Efforts to provide vaccinations to educators, other staff, and students, if eligible:

Empowerment Academy does not provide services for vaccination at this time. However, per the state guidance neither vaccination nor routine testing is required for students and staff members. If any member of our community is interested in obtaining information about vaccination, please see the following: <https://www.jerseycitynj.gov/cityhall/health/covid19vaccines>. There is a comprehensive list of locations that offer vaccination services within Hudson County.

H. Appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to the health and safety policies

As per NJDOE guidance, we will not require students to wear face masks when the student has a documented medical condition, or disability as reflected in an Individualized Education Program (IEP), that precludes the use of face covering. If a need arises for other appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities in regard to our health and safety policies, we will make the appropriate accommodations. These decisions will be made by the Director of Education, Special Education Coordinator, School Nurse, and Health Officials.

2. Ensuring Continuity of Services

A. Describe how the LEA will ensure continuity of services, including but not limited to services to address students’ academic needs and students’ and staff’s social, emotional, mental health, and other needs, which may include student health and food services. (1000 character limit):

While we are operating in-person, all programs and services are being provided to students ages three through 21 according to Federal and NJAC 6A:14 requirements with modifications and accommodations, as required. Students will continue to receive provisions of their IEP and will be provided with a free and appropriate education including special education and related services to the greatest extent appropriate. Appropriately certified and qualified professional staff members will continue to implement these programs through distance learning opportunities or individualized learning packets, as the use of school facilities will not be available. Student progress is being monitored by both the teacher and case manager. Student data will be used to determine achieved goals and objectives to determine the possible need for an extended school year or compensatory education.

Equitable Access to Instruction

In order for all students to have access to curriculum during an extended absence, school issued/assigned Chromebooks will be distributed to all students in Grades K-8.

Special Education Programming

All special education programming will be consistent with the student's individualized education program (IEP) and shall meet the New Jersey Student Learning Standards.

ELL/Bilingual Services

Empowerment Academy is providing in-person instructional options to address the needs of the English Language Learners.

Access to Guidance Counselors/Social Workers

The Guidance Department will see students in-person but are also available via email, google chat, office phone, etc.

Food Services Plan

To ensure the provision of school nutrition benefits or services for eligible students, Empowerment Academy will do its best to feed students on Free and Reduced Lunch status in -person.

3. Public Comment

A. Describe how the LEA sought public comment on its plan, and how it took those public comments into account in the development of its plan. Note, the ARP requires that LEAs seek public comment for each 60-day revision to the plan. (1000 character limit)

This plan was initially developed by Empowerment Academy's Leadership team in conjunction with our Pandemic Response Team and our Board of Trustees. Empowerment Academy ("EA") also sought community comment on its plans via electronic correspondence and used the constructive feedback we received to improve our plans.

Since implementing the plan, we have frequently surveyed school families and staff to spotlight how its working and where it might be improved. Importantly, we have also held recurring meetings with our grade-level based professional learning communities for input into where plan changes should be made.

B. Describe how the LEA ensured that the plan is in an understandable and uniform format; is to the extent practicable written in a language that parents can understand or, if not practicable to provide written translations to a parent with limited English proficiency, will be orally translated for such a parent; and upon request by a parent who is an individual with a disability as defined by the ADA, will be provided in an alternative format accessible to that parent. (1000 character limit)

The plan is available in our two most common second languages. We utilize our service agreement with "Language Line," a translation service, to translate information into additional languages per request. Importantly, we have a highly diverse staff with many who were born overseas or into families where English was not their first language, and our instructional staff and student support professionals regularly communicate with scholar families by email, phone call and meeting. That gives us multiple ways to communicate information to parents/guardians who may speak a language that is not common among our families, or that have a disability.