



Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Service Plan for Empowerment Academy

Created June 8, 2021: Version 1

LEAs must submit to the NJDOE and post on their website their Safe Return Plans by June 24, 2021.

EA will always keep an updated “Safe Reopening Plan” on our homepage at www.empacad.org.

Introduction

COVID-19 has affected every aspect of our lives. Since March 2020, Empowerment Academy has adapted to a new way of providing education. We have revised our reopening plans multiple times to reflect changing guidance and executive orders, parents and teacher feedback, health data and pandemic outcomes, and student needs. We had 3 phases of reopening that were amended along the way to provide the best education we could while ensuring everyone’s health and safety. We had an amazing and supportive community that helped us navigate this difficult time to the best of our ability.

On May 17, 2021, Governor Murphy [announced](#) that upon the conclusion of the 2020-2021 school year, portions of Executive Order 175 allowing remote learning will be rescinded, meaning that schools will be required to provide full-day, in-person instruction, as they were prior to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. To summarize, it is Empowerment’s plan to reopen with significantly less restrictions on September 7, 2021. As we know, COVID-19 is still among us and we will have safety guidelines to continue operating as safely as possible. As such, everything outlined in this plan IS subject to change based on new data and guidelines that come available.

This plan was developed by Empowerment Academy’s Leadership team, in conjunction with our Pandemic Response Team and our Board of Trustees. Empowerment has also sought public comment on this plan and carefully incorporated feedback into the development of it. The school year ahead may still be challenging for many community members, but we are optimistic about returning to learning in a more traditional setting. The school’s board and administration sincerely thanks all students, staff, and families for their understanding as well as for their positivity and unity during this difficult time. We ask that each community member continue to be patient and understanding as we are still navigating uncharted waters.

LEA Plan for Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services: Version 1 6/8/2021

LEA Name: Empowerment Academy Charter School

Date: 6/8/2021

Date Revised:

1. Maintaining Health and Safety

For each mitigation strategy listed below (A–H), please describe how the LEA will maintain the health and safety of students, educators, and other staff and the extent to which it has adopted policies, and a description of any such policies, on each of the following safety recommendations established by the CDC.

A. Universal and correct wearing of masks

From the CDC’s Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools it still recommends students wear masks inside educational settings. We will be closely monitoring any policy updates.

At the current time, all students and staff will be required to wear masks. Mask wearing is monitored by transportation staff in the morning as students enter and ride the bus. Mask wearing is also monitored by security and teachers/ leaders assigned to arrival duty. We will greet our scholars each day and ensure everyone’s health and safety by ensuring everyone is correctly wearing a mask anytime they are on the school premises. Teachers, support staff, school leaders, school nurses, and security personnel monitor mask wearing throughout the day. Teachers reinforce proper mask wearing protocols in each of their classrooms.

During Physical Education, if the children are outdoors and properly spaced, teachers will offer students Mask Breaks. Furthermore, the Governor has also given schools the ability to reduce restrictions outdoors in situations of extreme heat.

Free masks are available to students and staff on each of the buses and from the security offices on campus. Staff are allowed to wear their own masks, but we will provide them if they would like. We also have purchased face shields for any staff member who wishes to wear them for an additional layer of safety. Our School Nurse will work with any student or staff physician to determine if any accommodations are needed. While we know guidelines on wearing masks indoors in educational settings may change, this is our plan as of now.

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

From the CDC's Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools it says,

Elementary, Middle and High Schools: Recommend full in person instruction with a minimum of 3 feet between students with strict adherence to mask-wearing in Low, Moderate and High-Risk COVID-19 Levels

Middle and High Schools: Recommend full in person instruction with a minimum of 6 feet between students with strict adherence to mask-wearing in High-Risk COVID-19 Levels

To determine our "Risk Level" we will continue to rely on the NJ Department of Health's COVID Activity Level Index found here:

<https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/statistics/covid/index.shtml>

Empowerment plans to space students at least 3 feet apart when feasible. When not feasible, we will ensure students face in one direction to help limit the spread of droplets. We will not have students closely clustered or grouped in the classroom. If social distancing requirements increase or we are ever unable to accommodate our number of in person learners in any given space with current guidelines, the school will need to restructure its typical schedule to accommodate social distancing requirements which could include educational cohorts or a modified daily schedule. Given the current guidelines, we should all be able to fit safely in most of our classrooms. We will continue to space students 6 feet apart outside and in common areas when we "combine cohorts/pods" of students. We will continue to utilize one-direction stairwells, as well. We may continue to have staggered arrival and dismissal times to ensure social distancing during these busy times.

C. Handwashing and respiratory etiquette

Washing hands can keep you healthy and prevent the spread of respiratory infections from one person to the next. Germs can spread from other people or surfaces when you:

- Touch your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- Prepare or eat food and drinks with unwashed hands
- Touch a contaminated surface or objects
- Blow your nose, cough, or sneeze into hands and then touch other people's hands or a common object

Students will be required to use Hand Sanitizer any time they “break the barrier” of their classroom. We have had dispensers installed that students are to use anytime they enter or leave a classroom. Students are encouraged to wash hands with soap and water after using the bathroom. Dispensers have been installed and are checked regularly. Teachers instruct students in proper methods for hand washing and for using their elbows to cover their mouths for sneezes. Hand sanitizing stations are also available in common areas and offices. Staff and students are encouraged to use these.

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

Empowerment will follow the CDC’s recommendations for cleaning our educational facility found here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>

Our custodial team will rely on this guidance. In addition, they will ensure high-touch areas are disinfected multiple times a day. Bathrooms will be cleaned hourly when school is in session. Every night, desks will be sanitized and rooms will be cleaned. At least twice a week, each space will be sanitized with an electrostatic sprayer containing disinfectant.

Buses will also be cleaned using an electrostatic sprayer containing disinfectant in between routes.

As far as ventilation goes, Empowerment does not have a traditional “HVAC” system. However, we have made significant improvements to **ensure we are following the CDC’s recommendations**. Empowerment will keep windows open in classrooms and on buses, except for in extreme conditions or if the CALI risk levels in our community are low. We will also continue to:

- Bring as much fresh air as possible into classrooms and ensure windows are functional in each instructional space
- Have a fan in one classroom window pointing OUT to circulate air in the rooms
- Keep air conditioners clean and functional in each space
- Operate an Air Purification System with HEPA 13 filters in each room
- Ensure at least 3 windows per side are open on school buses

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

Empowerment will work with the Jersey City Health Department to facilitate Contact Tracing following positive COVID cases or exposure concerns. We will take detailed attendance records daily in classrooms and buses. While we do plan on resuming small group pull-out next year for certain services, we will limit mixing “pods' ' of students when possible. We will continue to quarantine students if we are unsure that proper mask wearing or social distancing was maintained preceding a positive COVID case. We will follow the recommendations of the Jersey City Health Department.

For the 2021/2022 SY, Empowerment does plan to respect the travel restrictions placed on New Jersey Residents which can be viewed here: <https://covid19.nj.gov/faqs/nj-information/travel-and-transportation/are-there-travel-restrictions-to-or-from-new-jersey>. These guidelines change frequently, so please ensure you are checking these guidelines before planning travel.

F. Diagnostic and screening testing

It is imperative that any student or staff member do not attend school if they are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19. We will continue to use attestations for Students and Staff to ensure that everyone entering the building is healthy. Please see the below list for other safety measures we plan to continue using to keep our community safe:

- Students must show a daily health attestation on a PHONE via “Oncourse Connect” in order to gain admittance to the school building or bus. These questions will change to reflect current guidance on symptoms/exposure concerns.
- Staff must complete a daily health attestation in order to clock in for the day. These questions will change to reflect current guidance on symptoms/exposure concerns. There are different guidelines for vaccinated versus unvaccinated staff.
- Students and staff have their temperature taken before getting on a school bus and/or entering the school building.
- We have increased our School Nurse team from 2 to 3 to ensure our students are supported. They will monitor any health concerns, isolate students, and determine next steps.
- EA reserves the right to require a Doctor’s Note or COVID Test at any time.
- Although it is typically our policy for students to stay home from school until they are 24 hours fever free, we are increasing this to 48 hours fever and symptom free for the 2021/2022 School Year.

- Empowerment is putting a “hold” on all attendance incentives for the first half of the year until we have a better picture. However, your child IS expected to be physically in school every single day that they are well. We ask that you do not send any child to school that is displaying any COVID or Cold symptoms (no matter how small). Please contact your School Leader to develop a plan for your child’s absence. We do reserve the right to require a doctor’s note at any time during the 2021/2022 School Year.

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

We will continue to work with the Jersey City Health Department to provide vaccination opportunities for staff and eligible students. We will continue to allow students and staff to have excused leave from school to ensure they are able to make vaccination appointments. In the past, we took advantage of Jersey City’s excellent program to vaccinate school staff from both the district and charter community. Empowerment will continue to require students to have certain immunizations and our School Nurse will work with families on ensuring all students are in compliance. The COVID-19 Vaccine is NOT on the list of required vaccinations at this time, but vaccinations for COVID-19 and the Flu are *highly recommended*.

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):

It is evident that many students regressed, academically, during the 2020/2021 School Year. To begin to offset some of this regression, we are offering a robust Summer Program. We will have a 5 week Summer Initiative that will provide academic support for each grade level. We will complement this program with a variety of activities that will support social and emotional learning. During the school year we are also

making some changes to our curriculum and staff to support our students from both an academic and emotional standpoint. Here are some of our program enhancements:

- Increased Intervention Teachers
- Increased Special Education Teachers
- Increased Social Workers
- Increased School Counselors
- Increased Teaching Assistants
- New Writing Curriculum
- Revisions to Scope and Sequences for existing curriculum
- Enhanced Gifted and Talented Program and new staff

Additionally, each summer we have what is called our “Summer Institute” -- two weeks of Professional Development for our staff. Given the pandemic, we will schedule more training sessions on how to support our scholars not only academically, but socially/emotionally. We also will afford additional time to increase support for our staff -- allocating significant time for community bonding and very targeted support to help our staff prepare for full in-person learning.

A decision still has not been made in regard to offering Aftercare. We are waiting to see what the Health Data looks like moving into the school year and what the recommendations will be in regard to combining groups of students. Should we be able to offer after school programming, Afterschool Tutoring and Enrichment Opportunities will be a priority.

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 developed by Empowerment Academy’s Leadership team in conjunction with our Pandemic Response Team and our Board of Trustees. EA also sought public comment on this plan via electronic correspondence. We carefully incorporated any feedback into the development of this plan.

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)

Empowerment will translate the final plan into Arabic and Spanish, our two most common second languages. We will arrange for oral translation for any other languages utilizing our service agreement with “Language Line,” a translation service.