Family and Student Handbook
2022 - 2023
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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. 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. Empower serves students in grades K-8.

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

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

Enrollment Policy

Empower Community School is committed to serving a diverse group of students, educators, and community members. It is in that spirit that we will implement an equitable student enrollment system, ensuring access to all learners. In accordance with Alabama Act 2015-3, Empower Community School will not “limit admission based on ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, income level, disability, proficiency in the English language, or academic or athletic ability.”

Student Enrollment and Random Lottery

Empower will enroll all students within the appropriate grade levels and age ranges unless more children apply to the school than there are spots available. In this case, the following process will be followed:

1. Empower will enroll students who reside in the Bessemer City Schools’ zone
   a. If there are more applicants residing in the BCS school zone than seats are available, students will be chosen via random lottery.
2. If the school has available seats after admitting students from #1, then students will be chosen, regardless of residency, via a random lottery.
3. If the school has available seats after #2, students will be admitted on a first come, first serve basis, regardless of residency.

In accordance with Act 2015-3, Empower Community School will implement the following enrollment preferences:

Preference 1: Students enrolled in the previous school year.
Preference 2: Siblings of students already enrolled in the public charter school.
Preference 3: Children of school founders, board members, and full-time employees. This preference group shall not exceed more than 10 percent of the school’s total student population.
Waitlist
After all enrollment seats have been filled, the lottery will continue to determine the order of students placed on the waitlist. Students will be offered enrollment in the order in which they are placed on the waitlist. Once the lottery process has been completed, students will be added to the waitlist in the order in which they complete their intent to enroll form. Students on the waitlist will receive periodic notifications outlining their current position.

Withdrawal and Re-Enrollment
When a family wishes to withdraw their student(s) from the school, the family will meet with a member of the school leadership team for an exit interview. During the exit interview, all textbooks and technology will be collected from the student. The school leadership team member will meet with the family to ascertain the reason for withdrawal and gain an understanding of the family’s school experience from the parent and student lenses. Finally, the registrar will complete the withdrawal form and provide the parent with the appropriate records for enrollment at the student’s new school. Students who have withdrawn from Empower Community School are eligible for reenrollment. However, they will be placed at the end of the waitlist once they have completed a new intent to enroll form.

Transfers
Students are welcome to transfer to Empower Community School. Enrollment requirements for transfer students are the same for students enrolled during the normal enrollment period. If a student wishes to transfer at a time when there are no available seats, the student will be placed on the school’s waitlist. Once accepted for enrollment, transfer students and families will meet with the Director of Student Support to review student records and complete an individualized learning plan for students. Transfer students are required to present records from their previous school, including applicable academic and discipline records. Students who are facing adverse disciplinary measures from another Alabama public school, including suspension, alternative assignment, and expulsion, must show proof of consequence completion before being enrolled at Empower Community School.

Pre-Admission Activities
The pre-admission activities outlined below are designed to inform students and parents about the mission, vision, and programs of Empower Community School. More importantly, families will have the opportunity to engage with the school’s leadership and staff and provide feedback on our plans. Two major components of the Pre-Admission Activities Plan are the Empower Community Cookout and Family Orientation Week. The community cookout is for the entire community, including students, parents, staff members, and community members. This event is purposed for all members of the community to connect, build relationships, and interact in a non-school setting. During family orientation week, families will have the opportunity to tour the school, interact with staff, and learn about all of Empower’s systems and processes. Additionally, families will meet their student advisor and began to forge support relationships designed to propel student academic, social, and emotional success.

Important Student Recruitment and Enrollment Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 1, 2021</td>
<td>Student Recruitment Begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-Enrollment Portal Opens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 4th, 2022</td>
<td>Pre-Enrollment Portal Closes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 18th, 2022</td>
<td>Public Lottery for Open Seats and Lottery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 21st, 2022</td>
<td>Lottery Results, Notice of Acceptance, and Waitlist Letters sent via Email and USPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 18th, 2022</td>
<td>Deadline to Accept Admission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 19th, 2022</td>
<td>Round 1 Notifications of Acceptance sent to Waitlist via Email and USPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 20th, 2022</td>
<td>Deadline to Accept Admission from Waitlist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 23rd, 2022</td>
<td>Round 2 of Notifications of Acceptance sent to Waitlist via Email and USPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 21st, 2022</td>
<td>Deadline to Accept Admission from Waitlist (Round 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 22nd, 2022</td>
<td>Individual Students Admitted from the Waitlist; Once waitlist is exhausted, rolling admissions will begin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1st, 2022</td>
<td>Residency Verification Deadline</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 30th, 2022</td>
<td>Empower Community Cookout</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 1-5, 2022</td>
<td>Family Orientation Week</td>
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Academic Framework

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 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.

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

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Score Range</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>90-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>80-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>70-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60-69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0-59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.

**Student Support and Special Services**

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 Director 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 Director 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
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-case 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 adaptions, 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 overrepresented in high incidence disabilities or underrepresented 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Entering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>Emerging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>Expanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>Bridging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 6</td>
<td>Reaching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.
Student Behavior and Discipline

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.”

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 for PBIS support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essential Elements</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tier 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Behavioral Expectations Defined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Behavioral Expectations Taught</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reward system for appropriate behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clearly defined consequences for problem behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Differentiated instruction for behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Continuous collection and use of data for decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Universal screening for behavior support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tier 2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Progress monitoring for at risk students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• System for increasing structure and predictability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• System for increasing contingent adult feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• System for linking academic and behavioral performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• System for increasing home/school communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Collection and use of data for decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Basic-level function-based support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tier 3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Functional Behavioral Assessment (full, complex)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Team-based comprehensive assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Linking of academic and behavior supports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 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 contingence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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7 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
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 student’s 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier</th>
<th>Balance</th>
<th>Interventions and Rewards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Tier 1| Student has a weekly balance of 10 or more points. | ● Conference with Advisor  
● Positive Phone Call  
● Choice of Reward  
● Announcement Recognition |
| Tier 2| Students has a weekly balance of 5 or more points | ● Conference with Advisor  
● Choice of Reward  
● Announcement Recognition |
| Tier 3| Student has a weekly balance of 0 points | ● Conference with Advisor |
| Tier 4| Student has a weekly between 0 and -5 | ● Conference with Advisor |
| Tier 5| Student has a weekly balance less than -5 | ● 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.”

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:

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?”

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Victims are asked these restorative questions:

- “What do you think you need to do to make things right?”
- “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 (Repeate 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
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 is 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.

Student Safety

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.