

Application Type

Charter School Renewal Application 2026 Cycle

Empower Community School

Submitted To

Alabama Public Charter School Commission

Submitted by

Empower Community School (AL-811)

Submitted at

08/31/2026 01:37 PM

A) Executive Summary

1. School Information

Status: Completed

Form Result

Please complete the information below concerning the school as currently formulated and the contact person for questions regarding this application.

School Name / LEA name / District Name Empower Schools of Alabama

Number of school locations (physical addresses) 2

Number of Cost Centers (for ALSDE funding purposes) 2

Grade Levels Served K-8

Contact name Meredith Davis

Contact email mdavis@empoweral.org

Contact phone number 2054138600

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

2. Enrollment and Demographic Information

Status: Completed

Form Result

Provide the enrollment and demographic information for the most recent school year in the form below.

Number of Students Enrolled 479

Number of Students on Waiting List 73

Number of Students by Sex Assigned at Birth

Count	
Female	226
Male	253
Total	479

Students by Ethnicity / Race

	Count
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1
Asian	0
Black or African American	391
Hispanic/Latino	52
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0
White	4
Two or More	31
Not Listed Above/Unknown	0
Total	479

Special Populations

	Count
Students with Disabilities	56
English Language Learners	35
Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch	379
Highly Capable Students	11

The Enrollment by Community Connection table below tracks the connection a student has to the school. Please use the definitions below:

Direct: Student is a board member's child, school leadership's child or staff's child.

In District: Student lives within the district in which the school resides, and does not have a direct connection.

Out of District: Student lives outside the district in which the school resides, and does not have a direct connection

Enrollment by Community Connection

	Count
Direct	16
In District	401
Out of District	103
Summary	520

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

3. School Mission Statement

Status: Completed

Form Result

Please provide the current, board approved, school mission statement.

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.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

4. Formal Letter of Intent for Charter Renewal

Status: Completed

Form Result

Letter of Intent for Charter Re-
newal

File name:

Board Letter - Charter Renewal 2026.pdf

Uploaded:

08/21/2026 05:42 PM

Uploaded by:

Meredith Davis

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

5. Signature Page

Status: Completed

Form Result

By signing below, all information provided in this application is certified to be true, accurate, and complete to the best of one's knowledge.

School Leader's Signature



Element Review

Reviews is not provided

B) LOOKING BACK: Record of Performance

1. Recruitment and Enrollment

Status: Completed

Form Result

This section provides an opportunity to describe recruitment efforts and enrollment trends over the contract term. Schools should reference the evidence contained in the recruitment and enrollment section of the school's Renewal Performance Report. Schools may also submit evidence that is not contained in the Renewal Performance Report that enhances or explains recruitment and enrollment efforts.

(a) Provide a narrative on how the school has, or has not, met the enrollment goals stated in the charter contract. Please reference the data contained in the school's Renewal Performance Report.

Empower Community School has demonstrated substantial enrollment growth during the charter term, although it has not consistently met the minimum enrollment goals established in the charter contract. The Renewal Performance Report reflects a school that expanded rapidly from its initial enrollment while experiencing some variation between projected enrollment targets and actual enrollment from year to year.

The Renewal Performance Report documents that Empower's student population grew from 131 students in FY2023 to 397 students in FY2026, meaning the school more than tripled its enrollment during the period reviewed. This growth represents significant progress in expanding access to the school and demonstrates sustained demand as Empower developed its K–8 educational program.

The Renewal Performance Report specifically notes that Empower experienced a 6% enrollment growth rate from SY2024–25 to SY2025–26. However, the report also indicates that the school did not achieve the level of growth necessary to fully meet its minimum enrollment target for SY2025–26. The report attributes the lower-than-anticipated growth primarily to lower-than-expected kindergarten enrollment and a decline in the number of students continuing at Empower from fourth to fifth grade.

Accordingly, Empower acknowledges that while its overall enrollment trajectory has been strong, the school has not consistently achieved every annual enrollment goal contained in the charter contract. The most recent year reflected in the Renewal Performance Report demonstrates this distinction: enrollment continued to grow, but the rate of growth was not sufficient to achieve the established minimum enrollment target.

The report also provides important evidence regarding student persistence once students enroll at Empower. From FY2023 to FY2026, while the student population increased from 131 to 397 students, the percentage of students who did not complete the school year declined from 13.7% to 9.3%. The Renewal Performance Report states that this decline appears to indicate that students enrolled at Empower find reasons to remain at the school for the entire year.

Year-to-year retention provides additional evidence of enrollment stability. The Renewal Performance Report indicates that Empower has had the same or higher percentages of students returning for the following school year than the charter-school average. The report concludes that students who begin the year at Empower generally remain through the year and return at greater rates the following year.

Overall, Empower's enrollment performance during the charter term is best characterized as significant growth accompanied by some shortfalls against annual contractual enrollment targets. The school expanded from 131 students to 397 students, improved its student completion rate,

and maintained year-to-year retention at or above charter-school comparison levels. At the same time, Empower recognizes that enrollment growth alone does not constitute full attainment of the enrollment goals established in the charter contract. The Renewal Performance Report demonstrates that the school must continue strengthening student recruitment, particularly at kindergarten, and the transition and retention of students between grade levels, including the transition from fourth to fifth grade.

The evidence contained in the Renewal Performance Report therefore demonstrates that Empower has established a strong foundation for sustained enrollment but has only partially met its contractual enrollment expectations. Continued attention to recruitment, student persistence, and grade-to-grade retention will be necessary to ensure that future enrollment growth aligns more consistently with the enrollment targets established for the school.

(b) Provide a narrative on the school's enrollment for the upcoming school year. Include information on confirmed and expected number of students. Discuss efforts to limit enrollment bleed (i.e. confirmed students who fail to appear at the start of school). Attach screenshots from PowerSchool or other enrollment tracking methods of evidence of confirmed enrollment for the upcoming school year.

Empower recognizes that confirmed enrollment does not always translate into actual enrollment at the beginning of the school year. Families may relocate, change educational plans, encounter transportation or other barriers, or accept placement at another school without formally notifying Empower. For this reason, the school has established proactive procedures to reduce enrollment bleed and quickly identify seats that may become available.

Prior to the beginning of school, families are clearly notified that failure to have their student report on the first day of school may result in the student being dropped from enrollment and the seat being made available to another student. This expectation encourages families to communicate with the school when circumstances may prevent a student from attending on the first day and allows Empower to more accurately determine which families intend to retain their seats.

At the same time, Empower recognizes that a student's first-day absence may be the result of a legitimate barrier rather than an indication that the family no longer intends to enroll. The school's goal is not simply to remove students who fail to appear. Empower's staff work diligently with families who communicate that they are experiencing difficulty getting their children to school on the first day. Our mental health team seeks to understand the circumstances contributing to the absence and, when possible, assist families in removing barriers that could prevent the student from beginning school as planned. This may include addressing transportation concerns, registration or documentation issues, communication challenges, or other circumstances affecting the student's ability to report.

This process allows Empower to balance two important enrollment responsibilities: supporting families who remain committed to attending Empower while promptly identifying confirmed students who do not intend to enroll. When a family communicates with the school and demonstrates an intent to attend, staff work with the family to support the student's successful arrival. When a student fails to report and the school is unable to confirm the family's continued intent to enroll, the school may release the seat so that it can be offered to another eligible student.

Empower also intentionally maintains an active enrollment pipeline and continues to process students for available seats. Enrollment, first-day attendance, incomplete registrations, withdrawals, and available seats are closely monitored during the opening weeks of school. This allows the school to respond quickly when vacancies occur and helps minimize the difference between projected enrollment and the number of students actually attending during the official enrollment count period.

These practices demonstrate that Empower approaches enrollment bleed through both accountability and family support. Families are expected to communicate and ensure that students report as scheduled, while the school works collaboratively with families experiencing legitimate barriers

to attendance. This approach helps protect enrollment stability without unnecessarily creating additional obstacles for families who intend for their children to attend Empower.

Upcoming school year enrollment

File 1	
File name:	Student Vacancies_Enrolled 26-27 - Sheet1 (1).pdf
Uploaded:	08/31/2026 12:28 PM
Uploaded by:	Meredith Davis

File 2	
File name:	Screenshot 2026-08-31 at 11.17.45 AM.png
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(c)Provide a narrative on recruitment efforts over the contract term. Address recruitment challenges and changes the school has made to enhance recruitment efforts. Attach sample recruitment materials the school has used over the contract term.

Empower has utilized a combination of digital, print, community-based, family-driven, and brand-awareness recruitment strategies throughout the charter contract term. Rather than relying on a single recruitment method, the school has intentionally created multiple opportunities for prospective families to learn about Empower through social media advertising, direct-mail campaigns, community engagement, current-family referrals, and the daily visibility of Empower staff throughout the community.

A significant component of the recruitment strategy has been social media advertising and outreach. Empower uses its social media platforms to advertise open enrollment, available seats, enrollment deadlines, school events, academic programs, student activities, and other aspects of the school experience. Both paid and organic social media content allow the school to reach prospective families throughout Bessemer and surrounding communities while providing current families with information they can easily share within their own networks.

Empower has also incorporated direct-mail recruitment through enrollment mailers. These mailers provide another method of reaching families who may not regularly interact with the school's social media platforms. Recruitment mailers communicate enrollment opportunities, grade levels served, application information, and distinguishing features of Empower's educational program. The combination of direct mail and digital advertising allows the school to reach families through multiple communication channels.

An increasingly important component of Empower's recruitment strategy is word-of-mouth recruitment through current families. As the school has grown and become more established within the community, currently enrolled families have become some of Empower's most effective ambassadors. Parents and guardians share their experiences with relatives, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and other families seeking educational options for their children. Empower encourages families to share enrollment announcements, social media posts, and information about available seats within their personal and community networks.

Empower has also intentionally used staff visibility and school branding as an organic community recruitment strategy. Empower team members routinely wear Empower-branded shirts, sweaters, jackets, and other school apparel during the workday and while representing the organization in the community. This practice creates consistent visibility for the Empower name and brand beyond the physical school campuses.

When staff members visit local businesses, attend community events, participate in meetings, or otherwise interact with community members while wearing Empower apparel, the school branding frequently creates opportunities for conversations about the school. Staff members can answer questions about Empower, explain the school's K–8 program, discuss enrollment opportunities, and direct interested families to additional information.

This strategy is particularly valuable because recruitment often begins with awareness and personal interaction. A prospective parent may first learn about Empower after seeing the school's name or logo on a staff member's apparel and asking a question about the school. These informal interactions allow staff members to serve as everyday ambassadors for Empower and extend recruitment beyond formal enrollment campaigns.

The practice also reinforces a culture in which recruitment is viewed as an organization-wide responsibility rather than solely the responsibility of an enrollment or administrative office. Every staff member has the potential to positively represent Empower, communicate the school's mission, and connect prospective families with the enrollment process.

Over the charter contract term, Empower's recruitment strategy has evolved into a multifaceted, year-round approach designed to increase community awareness, attract prospective families, and support sustained enrollment growth. Recruitment efforts have included paid and organic social media outreach, direct-mail campaigns, community engagement, current-family word-of-mouth referrals, and the continuous visibility of staff members wearing Empower-branded apparel throughout the community. Together, these strategies provide a balance of formal advertising and authentic, person-to-person engagement, creating multiple opportunities for prospective families to learn about Empower and connect with the enrollment process.

These efforts have contributed to substantial enrollment growth over the charter term. The Renewal Performance Report reflects an increase from 131 students in FY2023 to 397 students in FY2026, demonstrating Empower's growing presence and recognition within the community. While this growth is significant, Empower recognizes that maintaining enrollment requires more than successful recruitment. It also requires an intentional system for moving families from initial interest through enrollment, attendance, and ultimately year-to-year retention.

Accordingly, during the renewal period, Empower will strengthen its enrollment model through the implementation of clearly defined Enrollment Roles and Responsibilities at both the district and school levels. Enrollment will no longer be viewed primarily as the responsibility of a single individual or department; instead, it will be treated as a shared organizational priority with clearly assigned ownership and accountability. Specific responsibilities will be established for recruitment, application monitoring, prospective-family follow-up, registration and document completion, PowerSchool enrollment verification, waitlist management, student onboarding, recurrent enrollment, and analysis of student withdrawals and enrollment trends. School leaders and staff will also share responsibility for retention by providing positive family experiences, maintaining timely communication, engaging with the community, and consistently promoting the Empower school model.

District leadership will regularly monitor enrollment against established grade-level minimum and maximum targets, allowing the organization to identify enrollment gaps early and adjust recruitment and retention strategies accordingly. This more coordinated structure will help reduce the loss of prospective students between application and actual attendance, improve year-to-year student retention, and create greater staff ownership of enrollment outcomes. Enrollment planning will also remain closely aligned with available facility capacity so that growth occurs responsibly and does not exceed Empower's ability to provide students with appropriate instructional space and high-quality educational services.

Going forward, Empower will continue to treat recruitment, enrollment, and retention as interconnected, year-round responsibilities. Formal recruitment through mailers and social media will continue to be reinforced by family referrals, community engagement, staff visibility, and positive experiences for currently enrolled students and families. By pairing these established recruitment strategies with clearer internal roles, routine enrollment monitoring, stronger family follow-up, and greater school-level ownership, Empower will move from primarily recruiting students to implementing a more comprehensive enrollment strategy focused on attracting families, successfully enrolling students, and retaining them as members of the Empower community.

Recruitment Materials

File 1

File name: 2462198223913979--
Ads-Jul-20-2026-Aug-18-2026.csv

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Uploaded by: Meredith Davis

File 2

File name: Ads Manager - Manage ads - Ads.pdf

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File 3

File name: 0ERS0971 (1).pdf

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File 4

File name: Empower Enrollment Roles and Responsibilities Matrix .pdf

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(d)Provide a narrative on keeping students enrolled throughout the school year. Attach data on the changes in enrollment from the start of the school year to the end of the school year over the contract term. Include data on students who left on their own volition versus students who were asked to leave. Provide details on the reasons students have left mid-year if known.

Empower Schools of Alabama recognizes that enrollment stability requires more than successfully recruiting students at the beginning of each school year. An equally important component of enrollment management is the school's ability to retain students and support families throughout the school year. Accordingly, Empower works proactively with families experiencing challenges that could potentially result in withdrawal and seeks, whenever possible, to remove barriers that interfere with a student's continued enrollment.

The Renewal Performance Report provides evidence that Empower has made progress in this area. While the school's enrollment increased substantially during the contract term, the percentage of students who did not complete the school year declined from 13.7% to 9.3%. The Renewal Performance Report specifically notes that this decline appears to indicate that students enrolled at Empower find reasons to remain at the school for the entire year. The report further indicates that Empower's returning-student percentages have been the same as or higher than the charter-school average and concludes that students who begin the year at Empower tend to remain through the year and return the following year at greater rates.

Empower's approach to student retention is centered on family support, communication, problem-solving, and early intervention. When school staff become aware that a family is experiencing a challenge that could affect continued enrollment, the team works with the family to understand the circumstances and, when possible, identify solutions that allow the student to remain enrolled.

The school recognizes that families may experience transportation difficulties, attendance concerns, changes in family circumstances, academic or behavioral concerns, health or family challenges, or other barriers that can make continued enrollment difficult. Staff members work across departments to communicate with families, clarify expectations, connect families with available resources, and identify reasonable solutions before a family reaches the point of withdrawal.

Empower's goal is to ensure that families do not feel that withdrawal is their only option when they encounter a challenge. While every circumstance cannot be resolved by the school, the team works diligently to support families and remove barriers whenever possible so students can sustain their enrollment at Empower.

During the contract term, Empower has not asked students to leave the school during the middle of the school year. Mid-year withdrawals have been initiated by parents or guardians based on individual family circumstances and educational decisions. Empower does not counsel students out because of academic performance, attendance concerns, behavioral challenges, or other difficulties experienced during the school year.

When known and documented, reasons parents and guardians have chosen to withdraw students during the school year have included:

- Relocation – families moving to another community or geographic area;
- Length of the school day – families determining that Empower's school-day schedule no longer meets their family's needs;
- Attendance/truancy expectations – families choosing another educational option after experiencing difficulty meeting the school's expectations for regular and consistent attendance;
- Transportation – families experiencing transportation challenges that make consistent travel to and from Empower difficult;
- Returning to homeschool – families choosing to return to or begin a homeschool educational program;
- Parent illness – changes in family circumstances resulting from a parent's illness that affect the family's ability to maintain the student's enrollment;
- Moving out of the country – families relocating internationally and therefore withdrawing their children from Empower; and
- Other documented reasons – individual family circumstances or educational decisions communicated to the school during the withdrawal process.

These reasons reflect the varied circumstances that can influence a family's ability or decision to remain enrolled in a school of choice. When possible, Empower documents the reason for withdrawal through its student enrollment and withdrawal processes. When a family does not provide a reason, the school does not speculate or assign a reason that has not been communicated.

Two areas that can significantly affect enrollment stability are attendance and transportation. Empower maintains clear attendance and truancy expectations because regular attendance is essential to academic success. At the same time, the school's approach is to support families in meeting those expectations rather than use attendance challenges as a reason to remove a student.

When attendance concerns arise, staff communicate with families to identify contributing factors and work toward solutions. The Renewal Performance Report demonstrates substantial progress in this area. Chronic absenteeism declined from 22.45 in SY2022–23 to 19.28 in SY2023–24 and 9.84 in SY2024–25. The report specifically identifies the reduction in chronic absenteeism as a highlight of Empower's performance.

Transportation can similarly create a barrier for families. When transportation concerns are identified, the school works with families to determine whether available transportation resources or other solutions can support continued attendance. Despite these efforts, some families ultimately determine that transportation challenges make another educational option more appropriate for their circumstances.

Empower monitors enrollment throughout the school year to identify student mobility patterns and determine whether particular issues require additional intervention. Start-of-year and end-of-year enrollment comparisons, withdrawal records, withdrawal codes, and documented reasons for withdrawal provide the school with information to evaluate both retention and the effectiveness of family-support efforts.

For the renewal application, Empower will attach data showing enrollment changes from the beginning to the end of each school year during the contract term. The supporting exhibit will distinguish between parent-initiated/voluntary withdrawals and students asked to leave by the school. Because Empower has not asked students to leave during the middle of the school year, the latter category will reflect zero students for each year of the contract term.

The exhibit should also categorize documented voluntary withdrawals, when known, by reason, including relocation, length of school day, attendance/truancy expectations, transportation, returning to homeschool, parent illness, moving out of the country, and other documented reasons. PowerSchool enrollment and withdrawal reports or other official enrollment records should be used to substantiate the final counts.

Overall, Empower's retention practices reflect a commitment to keeping students enrolled by supporting families rather than creating barriers to continued attendance. The school's first response when a family experiences difficulty is to communicate, understand the circumstances, and determine whether the school can assist in resolving the issue.

At the same time, Empower respects that families may ultimately determine that another educational arrangement better meets their needs. Mid-year withdrawals have occurred for a variety of parent-initiated reasons, including relocation, the length of the school day, attendance and truancy expectations, transportation challenges, returning to homeschool, parent illness, moving out of the country, and other documented family circumstances. Importantly, students have not been asked by Empower to leave during the middle of the school year.

Going forward, Empower will continue monitoring withdrawal patterns and reasons, strengthening communication with families, addressing attendance and transportation barriers, and identifying opportunities for intervention before challenges result in withdrawal. The school's goal remains to ensure that students and families who choose Empower receive the support necessary, whenever reasonably possible, to remain part of the Empower community throughout the school year.

Mid-year enrollment loss	File name:	Mid-Year Enrollment Loss - Sheet1.pdf
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	Uploaded by:	Meredith Davis

(e)Provide a narrative on efforts to keep students engaged and committed to return to the school from one school year to the next. Provide data on recurrent enrollment over the contract term as an attachment.

Empower Schools of Alabama recognizes that sustained enrollment depends not only on recruiting new students, but also on creating an educational experience that encourages students and families to remain with Empower from one school year to the next. Throughout the charter contract term, the school has worked to strengthen student engagement, family relationships, school culture, academic programming, and opportunities for students to develop a meaningful connection to the Empower community.

The Renewal Performance Report provides evidence that these efforts have contributed to student persistence and recurrent enrollment. The report indicates that Empower has had the same or higher percentages of students returning for the following school year than the charter-school average. It further concludes that students who begin the year at Empower generally remain through the school year and return the following year at greater rates.

A central component of Empower's retention strategy is creating an environment in which students feel connected to their school. Empower has intentionally expanded opportunities for students to develop relationships with peers and adults, participate in school traditions, and experience a sense of belonging beyond the academic classroom.

The implementation of the House System has strengthened this work by creating smaller communities within the larger school environment. Students and staff are organized into Houses that provide opportunities for relationship building, leadership, positive competition, recognition, service, and school spirit. The House structure is intended to give students an additional sense of identity and belonging while strengthening relationships across grade levels.

Empower also uses SEL supports, community-building activities, PBIS, student recognition, celebrations, and school-wide events to increase student connection and reinforce positive participation in the school community.

The school's SEL and culture/climate surveys provide an important mechanism for evaluating this work. The March 2026 Student Culture and Climate Survey showed the strongest student perceptions in Inclusion at 62%, Learning Strategies at 60%, and Rigorous Expectations at 60%. At the same time, the survey identified areas requiring continued attention, including Sense of Belonging, Teacher-Student Relationships, Engagement, Fairness, and School Safety. These results are being used to guide continued improvements to the student experience.

Empower has worked to ensure that students have reasons to be excited about attending school beyond core academic instruction. Students have access to enrichment, extracurricular, leadership, and athletic opportunities that allow them to explore interests and build relationships with peers and staff.

Opportunities have included activities such as choir, drama, anime, photography, board games, pickleball, line dancing, athletics, cheer, and other enrichment activities. These opportunities are particularly important in the middle grades, where student engagement and connection to school can influence whether families remain with the school as students approach high school.

Empower continues to evaluate student interests and expand opportunities as enrollment and organizational capacity grow.

Student retention is also connected to whether families believe their children are making academic progress. Empower has therefore continued strengthening its instructional program through high-quality curriculum, targeted intervention, small-group instruction, personalized learning, academic progress monitoring, and increased rigor.

The Renewal Performance Report provides evidence of improved academic growth, with Empower moving from "Does Not Meet" in Academic Growth in SY2023–24 to "Exceeds" in SY2024–25. More recent SY2025–26 ACAP results also show increased proficiency in all three tested areas, with ELA reaching 35.9%, mathematics 6.8%, and science 24.5%.

While academic achievement remains an area requiring continued improvement, providing families with evidence of their individual student's progress and demonstrating continued improvement in the

school's academic program are important components of building long-term family confidence and commitment.

Empower recognizes that students do not make re-enrollment decisions independently. Family satisfaction, communication, trust, and connection to the school are essential to recurrent enrollment.

Throughout the year, the school communicates with families regarding academic progress, attendance, school activities, celebrations, enrollment opportunities, and organizational updates. School events and family engagement opportunities allow parents and guardians to interact with teachers, administrators, and other families and strengthen their connection to the school community.

Current families also serve as important ambassadors for Empower. Parents frequently share their experiences with relatives, friends, neighbors, and other families considering educational options. This word-of-mouth recruitment is significant because a family's willingness to recommend Empower to another family can also be an indicator of its continued commitment to the school.

Empower's recurrent enrollment strategy also includes addressing challenges that could cause families to leave. When staff become aware that a family is experiencing transportation difficulties, attendance concerns, academic challenges, or other circumstances affecting continued enrollment, the team works to identify possible solutions.

The objective is to remove barriers whenever reasonably possible rather than allow a solvable problem to result in a student's withdrawal or decision not to return the following year.

This family-support approach extends from one school year into the next. Staff maintain relationships with families and work to address concerns that could influence re-enrollment decisions. When recurring issues are identified through family feedback, withdrawal information, attendance data, or student surveys, those findings can inform changes to school practices.

The Renewal Performance Report provides encouraging evidence regarding Empower's ability to retain students. It specifically states that Empower has had the same or higher percentages of students returning for the following year than the charter-school average.

The report also provides evidence of improved persistence within individual school years. As Empower's enrollment grew from 131 students in FY2023 to 397 students in FY2026, the percentage of students who did not complete the school year declined from 13.7% to 9.3%. These findings indicate that the school has been able to expand significantly while also improving its ability to keep students enrolled.

Empower recognizes that recurrent enrollment must continue to be monitored carefully, particularly at key transition points. The Renewal Performance Report specifically identifies a decline in students continuing from fourth to fifth grade as one factor affecting enrollment growth. This finding reinforces the need for targeted transition activities and family communication as students move between grade levels and campuses.

Going forward, Empower will continue strengthening the student and family experience through school culture and belonging initiatives, the House System, SEL supports, enrichment and extracurricular opportunities, academic improvement, family engagement, student recognition, and proactive family support. Survey results, recurrent enrollment data, withdrawal information, and family feedback will be used to identify areas requiring additional attention.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

2. Academic Performance

Status: Completed

Form Result**ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**

This section provides an opportunity to describe the school's performance record on student achievement. Schools should reference the evidence contained in the Renewal Performance Report for their responses but may supplement with evidence of performance related to the measures in the Performance Framework that is not included in the Renewal Performance Report. Responses should refer to the specific criteria and benchmarks in the Performance Framework to which the information applies. Responses may include, but are not limited to, information about interim assessments or progress reports; evidence of performance on the school's mission-specific metrics and goals; and evidence and description of initiatives undertaken at the school to address performance shortfalls.

(a) Using the measures contained in the academic portion of the Performance Framework, provide a narrative on how the school has, or has not, met its performance expectations. Please reference only evidence from the Renewal Performance Report.

Based solely on the academic measures contained in the 2026 Renewal Performance Report, Empower Community School has demonstrated mixed academic performance across the charter term, with notable improvement in academic growth and attendance, while academic proficiency, particularly mathematics, remains an area in which performance expectations have not been fully met. The Performance Report evaluates the school through State and Federal Accountability, Academic Proficiency, Academic Growth, College and Career Readiness, and Mission-Specific Measures. The overall academic summary shows that State and Federal Accountability was rated Meets in SY2022–23, Does Not Meet in SY2023–24, and returned to Meets in SY2024–25. Academic Proficiency was rated Approaches, Does Not Meet, and Approaches, respectively, while Academic Growth improved from Does Not Meet in SY2023–24 to Exceeds in SY2024–25.

Empower's performance under the State and Federal Accountability indicator reflects both challenges and recovery during the renewal period. The school's overall state report card score was 66 (D) in SY2022–23, declined to 56 (F) in SY2023–24, and returned to 66 (D) in SY2024–25. Academic Achievement followed a similar pattern, moving from 40.89 to 34.06 before recovering to 40.48. Academic Growth was 100 in SY2022–23, declined to 75.59 in SY2023–24, and increased to 90.22 in SY2024–25. Based on the framework's comparison measures, Empower therefore met State and Federal Accountability expectations in two of the three years for which ratings were available.

The Renewal Performance Report also identifies chronic absenteeism as a particular area of strength. The chronic absenteeism rate declined consistently from 22.45 in SY2022–23 to 19.28 in SY2023–24 and 9.84 in SY2024–25. The report specifically identifies chronic absenteeism as a "highlight" for Empower, noting that by SY2024–25 the school's rate was less than half that of the district comparison and only slightly more than two percentage points above the state average.

At the same time, the report identifies continued concerns regarding overall academic achievement. Empower's academic achievement has consistently exceeded that of the surrounding school system

but remained well below the statewide average. The gap between Empower and statewide academic achievement increased from 20.86 points in SY2022–23 to 25.8 points in SY2024–25.

Academic proficiency represents the school's most significant area of continued concern. Empower received an overall Academic Proficiency rating of Approaches in SY2022–23, Does Not Meet in SY2023–24, and Approaches in SY2024–25. Thus, the school did not receive a "Meets" or "Exceeds" rating for academic proficiency during any of the years reported.

ELA proficiency remained relatively stable across the reporting period at 33.33% in SY2022–23, 30.22% in SY2023–24, and 32.9% in SY2024–25. The Renewal Performance Report notes that Empower consistently outperformed the surrounding system in ELA but remained below the state average.

Mathematics proficiency is identified as the school's most substantial academic challenge. Proficiency increased from 0% in SY2022–23 to 1.42% in SY2023–24 and 2.16% in SY2024–25. Although this represents improvement over the period, the report states that mathematics proficiency remained "dramatically lower" than the state and was also below the surrounding system.

Science proficiency also demonstrated variability. Empower reported science proficiency of 21.25% in SY2022–23, 10.00% in SY2023–24, and 21.25% in SY2024–25. According to the report, Empower performed above the district average in science in SY2022–23 and SY2024–25 but remained below the statewide average. In SY2023–24, science proficiency was below both the district and statewide averages.

Academic growth provides the strongest evidence of recent academic improvement. The Performance Framework establishes that year-to-year growth of 10% or more earns an Exceeds rating, while growth between 5% and 10% earns a Meets rating.

Empower's Academic Growth indicator was rated Does Not Meet in SY2023–24, when ELA growth was -9.3% and science growth was -52.9%. However, the school experienced a substantial reversal in SY2024–25. ELA growth reached 8.9%, mathematics growth reached 52.1%, and science growth reached 112.5%, resulting in an overall Academic Growth rating of Exceeds.

The Renewal Performance Report explains that ELA and science proficiency rebounded in SY2024–25 to approximately their SY2022–23 levels after declines in SY2023–24. Mathematics proficiency also increased from 1.42% to 2.16%. Consequently, while absolute proficiency remains low, particularly in mathematics, the most recent year of available data demonstrates substantial year-over-year improvement and indicates that students were making measurable academic progress.

Taken as a whole, the Renewal Performance Report demonstrates that Empower has partially met its academic performance expectations and has shown meaningful improvement in its most recent year of reported data, but significant proficiency challenges remain. The school met State and Federal Accountability expectations in SY2022–23 and again in SY2024–25 after not meeting expectations in SY2023–24. Most notably, Academic Growth improved from Does Not Meet to Exceeds, demonstrating significant progress across ELA, mathematics, and science in SY2024–25. At the same time, Academic Proficiency has remained below the level required to meet expectations throughout the reporting period, with mathematics representing the most significant area of concern.

Accordingly, the evidence in the Renewal Performance Report reflects a school whose student growth trajectory improved substantially during the most recent reporting year, while overall achievement and proficiency have not yet reached expected levels. The return to a Meets rating for State and Federal Accountability, the Exceeds rating for Academic Growth, and the substantial reduction in chronic absenteeism provide evidence of positive academic momentum. However, continued

improvement in ELA, science, and especially mathematics proficiency will be necessary for Empower to fully meet the academic expectations established within the Performance Framework.

(b) Please describe any academic performance-related supplemental evidence that is not captured in the Renewal Performance Report that enhances the narrative on academic performance. Please reference the specific measures from the academic portion of the Performance Framework to which the information applies, as appropriate.

Supplemental academic evidence not captured in the Renewal Performance Report provides important additional context regarding Empower's academic trajectory. This evidence is particularly significant because the Renewal Performance Report lists SY2025–26 academic results as NA. More recent SY2025–26 ACAP results demonstrate continued improvement in all three tested academic areas, ELA, mathematics, and science, while Empower has simultaneously experienced significant enrollment growth that has changed the composition of its annual testing cohorts. This supplemental evidence is most directly applicable to the Performance Framework measures of Academic Proficiency, Academic Growth, and State and Federal Accountability.

An important factor in evaluating Empower's academic performance is the substantial increase in student enrollment over the charter term. The Renewal Performance Report documents enrollment of 131 students in SY2022–23, 255 students in SY2023–24, 375 students in SY2024–25, and 397 students in SY2025–26. The report further notes that Empower's student population tripled from FY23 to FY26.

From SY2022–23 to SY2025–26, Empower added 266 students, representing an enrollment increase of approximately 203%. By SY2025–26, the school was serving approximately 3.03 times the number of students enrolled in SY2022–23.

This rapid growth is important to the Academic Proficiency, Academic Growth, and State and Federal Accountability measures because Empower's annual testing population has not represented a static cohort of students. Each year, the school has incorporated additional students with different educational histories, levels of prior academic preparation, and lengths of enrollment at Empower. A number of students have arrived at Empower demonstrating significant academic deficits and unfinished learning, requiring the school to simultaneously remediate foundational skills while providing grade-level instruction.

Accordingly, year-to-year proficiency rates include both students who have benefited from multiple years of Empower instruction and students who have enrolled more recently and may have had limited instructional time at Empower before participating in statewide assessments. This context does not diminish the importance of reaching grade-level proficiency; rather, it reinforces the importance of examining academic proficiency and academic growth together when evaluating the effectiveness of the school's instructional program.

The most recent ACAP proficiency results provide encouraging evidence that Empower's academic trajectory continues to improve beyond the period for which the Renewal Performance Report provides formal academic ratings.

In ELA, proficiency increased from 32.9% in SY2024–25 to 35.9% in SY2025–26, representing a 3.0 percentage-point increase. This represents continued improvement following the SY2023–24 ELA proficiency rate of 30.22%. The Renewal Performance Report notes that Empower has consistently outperformed the surrounding system in ELA, although performance has remained below the statewide average. The SY2025–26 results demonstrate continued movement in a positive direction.

In mathematics, proficiency increased from 2.16% in SY2024–25 to 6.8% in SY2025–26, representing an increase of 4.64 percentage points. This is particularly significant because mathematics is identified in the Renewal Performance Report as Empower's greatest academic challenge. The report states that mathematics proficiency had improved but remained dramatically below the state and surrounding system. While the SY2025–26 mathematics proficiency rate remains an

area requiring substantial improvement, the increase from 2.16% to 6.8% represents the largest year-over-year proficiency gain among the three tested subject areas.

In science, proficiency increased from 21.25% in SY2024–25 to 24.5% in SY2025–26, an improvement of 3.25 percentage points. This continues the recovery identified in the Renewal Performance Report after science proficiency declined to 10.0% in SY2023–24 before returning to 21.25% in SY2024–25. The report also notes that Empower performed above the surrounding district in science in SY2022–23 and SY2024–25, although it remained below the statewide average.

Most importantly, proficiency increased in every tested content area in SY2025–26. ELA increased by 3.0 percentage points, mathematics increased by 4.64 percentage points, and science increased by 3.25 percentage points. This provides supplemental evidence that the academic recovery reflected in the Renewal Performance Report continued into SY2025–26.

The supplemental proficiency results are also important when considered alongside the Academic Growth measure of the Performance Framework. The Renewal Performance Report identifies growth as one of Empower's strongest recent academic indicators.

Empower moved from an overall Academic Growth rating of "Does Not Meet" in SY2023–24 to "Exceeds" in SY2024–25. During SY2024–25, ELA growth was 8.9%, mathematics growth was 52.1%, and science growth was 112.5%.

The SY2025–26 proficiency results provide additional evidence consistent with that positive trajectory. Although proficiency rates and the Performance Framework's formal academic growth calculations are distinct measures and should not be used interchangeably, the fact that proficiency increased in ELA, mathematics, and science following an "Exceeds" Academic Growth rating provides evidence that students are continuing to move toward grade-level expectations.

The distinction between proficiency and growth is especially important given Empower's enrollment trajectory. Students entering the school with severe academic deficits may demonstrate substantial academic growth without immediately reaching the state's proficiency threshold. Consequently, the Academic Growth measure provides important evidence of the school's ability to accelerate student learning after enrollment.

The supplemental evidence also strengthens the narrative associated with the State and Federal Accountability measure. The Renewal Performance Report shows that Empower received a "Meets" rating in SY2022–23, "Does Not Meet" in SY2023–24, and returned to "Meets" in SY2024–25. During this period, the overall report card score moved from 66 to 56 and then returned to 66. Chronic absenteeism also improved substantially, declining from 22.45 to 9.84.

The SY2025–26 proficiency results provide additional evidence that the recovery reflected in the SY2024–25 accountability rating was accompanied by continued academic improvement. This occurred while Empower continued to serve an expanding student population and incorporate additional students into its accountability cohorts.

Taken together, the supplemental evidence strengthens the narrative that Empower is demonstrating a positive academic trajectory while simultaneously managing substantial enrollment growth and continually changing testing cohorts.

The school recognizes that academic proficiency remains below desired levels and that mathematics, in particular, requires continued intensive improvement. Enrollment growth and students' incoming academic deficits are not presented as reasons to disregard proficiency expectations. Rather, they provide necessary context for understanding the academic challenge confronting the school and why student growth must be considered alongside absolute proficiency.

The evidence demonstrates several important trends: Empower’s enrollment increased from 131 to 397 students over four years; the school earned an “Exceeds” Academic Growth rating in SY2024–25; State and Federal Accountability returned to “Meets”; chronic absenteeism declined substantially; and, most recently, SY2025–26 ACAP proficiency increased across every tested content area, ELA from 32.9% to 35.9%, mathematics from 2.16% to 6.8%, and science from 21.25% to 24.5%.

Accordingly, the supplemental evidence enhances the academic performance narrative by demonstrating that the improvements identified in the Renewal Performance Report have continued into SY2025–26. While Empower has additional work to do to ensure that a greater percentage of students reach grade-level proficiency, the combination of increasing proficiency, strong academic growth, improved accountability performance, and progress achieved while serving a rapidly expanding and changing student population provides evidence that the school's academic strategies are producing measurable improvement.

Document upload – supporting evidence	File name:	Empower_Academic_Supplemental_Evidence_UPDATED.xlsm.pdf
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(c)Provide evidence of outcomes related to any mission-specific academic goals and measures established in the charter contract that are not already captured in the Renewal Performance Report.

The Renewal Performance Report identifies social-emotional learning (SEL) and personalized learning as mission-specific educational priorities established in Empower Community School's charter. The Renewal Performance Report further notes that corresponding measures of success and benchmarks were not sufficiently articulated to permit a formal rating of these mission-specific measures. Accordingly, Empower does not seek to retroactively establish performance benchmarks or assign itself a rating. Instead, the school provides the following supplemental evidence to demonstrate implementation, outcomes, and the systems now in place to measure progress toward these mission-specific priorities.

Since the development of the original charter, Empower has strengthened its capacity to measure both the academic and social-emotional outcomes associated with its mission. Supplemental evidence includes longitudinal SEL and culture/climate surveys, student attendance and retention data, academic growth results, proficiency trends, diagnostic and benchmark assessment practices, and individualized intervention and instructional supports.

Social-emotional learning remains an important component of Empower’s educational model. The school's approach is designed to support students' social-emotional development, positive relationships, sense of belonging, self-management, engagement, leadership, and connection to the school community. Implementation has included SEL supports, community-building practices, student support services, PBIS structures, and other school-wide culture initiatives.

Importantly, Empower has moved beyond simply documenting the implementation of SEL activities and has established a systematic process for measuring student perceptions and social-emotional competencies. The Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Student Survey has now been administered ten times, providing longitudinal evidence that allows the school to monitor changes in students' perceptions over time.

The March 2026 SEL Student Survey included 213 students with 100% participation, providing a strong representation of the students eligible to participate in the administration. The survey consisted of 28 questions measuring seven SEL dimensions and produced an overall favorable response rate of 53%.

The March 2026 results showed 59% favorable responses for Growth Mindset, 59% for Social Awareness/Social Competence, and 58% for Self-Management. Additional dimensions included Perseverance at 53%, Self-Efficacy at 49%, Self-Awareness at 48%, and Curiosity at 46%.

These results provide direct evidence related to Empower's mission-specific SEL priority while also identifying areas requiring continued attention. The school does not view the survey results as uniformly positive. Overall favorability decreased from 59% in the previous administration to 53% in March 2026. Self-management declined by 11 percentage points, self-efficacy declined by 10 points, perseverance declined by six points, and self-awareness declined by six points. Curiosity was the only reported dimension showing improvement, increasing by one percentage point.

The longitudinal trend is also informative. The chart on page 1 of the SEL Survey shows overall favorability of 65% in spring 2024, 61% in fall 2024, 58% in spring 2025, 59% in fall 2025, and 53% in spring 2026. Rather than minimizing this decline, Empower considers these results important evidence for identifying areas in which its SEL program and student supports must become more responsive.

Empower's Student Culture and Climate Survey provides additional mission-specific evidence regarding the environment in which students learn and their perceptions of belonging, relationships, engagement, safety, inclusion, and academic expectations.

The March 2026 Student Culture and Climate Survey was also the 10th administration. It included 210 students with a 98% participation rate, consisted of 31 questions, and measured eight dimensions of student culture and climate. Overall favorability was 51%, compared with 60% in the prior administration.

Students reported the strongest favorable perceptions in Inclusion at 62%, Learning Strategies at 60%, and Rigorous Expectations at 60%. These results are particularly relevant to Empower's mission because they indicate that a majority of surveyed students reported favorable perceptions regarding inclusion, approaches to learning, and the academic expectations established for them.

At the same time, the survey identified important areas for improvement. Sense of Belonging was 48%, Teacher-Student Relationships was 45%, Fairness was 45%, Engagement was 41%, and School Safety was 40%.

These results provide actionable evidence for Empower's continued SEL and school-culture work. In particular, the findings establish measurable baselines for strengthening student belonging, relationships, engagement, fairness, and perceptions of safety. Future survey administrations can be used to determine whether school-wide culture initiatives and student supports result in measurable improvement in these areas.

Empower also monitors staff culture and climate because the adult environment contributes to the school's capacity to establish consistent, supportive learning environments for students.

The March 2026 Staff Culture and Climate Survey represented the 10th administration and included 42 staff members with 100% participation. Overall staff favorability reached 86%, increasing from 82% in the previous administration.

Within the measured dimensions, the Teachers dimension was 93% favorable and improved by three percentage points, while the Environment dimension was 84% favorable and improved by five percentage points.

The longitudinal trend displayed on page 1 provides additional evidence of substantial improvement in adult culture. Overall staff favorability increased from 64% in spring 2024 to 68% in fall 2024,

declined to 62% in spring 2025, and subsequently increased to 82% in fall 2025 and 86% in spring 2026. This represents a 22-percentage-point increase between spring 2024 and spring 2026.

The contrast between improving staff perceptions and declining student perceptions is particularly instructive for Empower's continuous-improvement work. While the adult culture data demonstrate substantial progress, student survey results indicate that improvements in the adult environment have not yet translated consistently into stronger student perceptions of belonging, engagement, relationships, fairness, and safety. These findings provide a clear basis for the school to focus future SEL and culture initiatives on improving the student experience.

Other available outcomes provide additional context for Empower's SEL mission. The Renewal Performance Report documents that while Empower experienced substantial enrollment growth, the percentage of students who did not complete the school year decreased from 13.7% to 9.3%. The report states that this decline appears to indicate that students enrolled at Empower find reasons to remain at the school throughout the year.

The report further indicates that Empower has had the same or higher percentages of students returning the following year than the charter-school average and notes that students who begin the year at Empower tend to remain through the year and return at greater rates the following year.

Chronic absenteeism provides another relevant outcome. The Renewal Performance Report shows that chronic absenteeism declined from 22.45 in SY2022–23 to 19.28 in SY2023–24 and 9.84 in SY2024–25.

These outcomes cannot be attributed exclusively to SEL programming. However, student attendance, persistence, and retention provide relevant supplemental indicators of students' continued participation and connection to the school and should be considered alongside the direct SEL and culture/climate survey evidence.

The second mission-specific academic priority identified for Empower is personalized learning. Empower's approach recognizes that students enter the school with different academic histories, skill levels, and instructional needs. This has become increasingly important as the school has expanded enrollment and incorporated larger numbers of students into its academic program.

Implementation of personalized learning includes the use of diagnostic and benchmark assessments, differentiated instructional groupings, small-group instruction, intervention and acceleration, progress monitoring, and adjustments to instruction based on individual student needs. These structures are intended to identify where students are academically, provide targeted support, and accelerate their progress toward grade-level expectations.

Although the original charter did not establish a measurable benchmark that would allow the school to assign a formal rating to personalized learning, Academic Growth provides a meaningful outcome measure related to the intended purpose of the model. The Renewal Performance Report specifically explains that academic growth allows schools to demonstrate effectiveness even when serving students who enter significantly below grade level.

Empower's overall Academic Growth rating improved from "Does Not Meet" in SY2023–24 to "Exceeds" in SY2024–25. In SY2024–25, ELA growth was 8.9%, mathematics growth was 52.1%, and science growth was 112.5%.

These growth results are particularly relevant to the personalized-learning mission because students who begin substantially below grade level may make significant academic progress without immediately reaching the state's proficiency threshold. Measuring progress from students' starting points

therefore provides an important indication of whether instructional supports are helping students close academic gaps.

More recent SY2025–26 ACAP proficiency results provide additional supplemental evidence of continued academic progress. ELA proficiency increased from 32.9% in SY2024–25 to 35.9% in SY2025–26; mathematics increased from 2.16% to 6.8%; and science increased from 21.25% to 24.5%. All three tested content areas therefore demonstrated year-over-year improvement.

These outcomes should not be attributed exclusively to personalized learning. However, when considered alongside Empower's "Exceeds" Academic Growth rating, they provide evidence consistent with the intended outcome of a model designed to respond to individual academic needs and accelerate students toward proficiency.

Taken together, the supplemental evidence provides a more complete picture of Empower's performance relative to its mission-specific priorities of social-emotional learning and personalized learning.

For personalized learning, the most significant outcome evidence is the school's movement to an "Exceeds" rating for Academic Growth in SY2024–25, followed by increased ACAP proficiency in all three tested subjects in SY2025–26. These results provide evidence that students are making academic progress, although significant proficiency gaps remain.

For social-emotional learning, Empower now has a substantial body of longitudinal survey data that was not reflected as a measurable outcome in the Renewal Performance Report. Ten administrations of the SEL and culture/climate surveys demonstrate that the school has developed a consistent mechanism for evaluating student and staff perceptions over time. The evidence identifies areas of relative strength, including student perceptions of growth mindset, social awareness/social competence, inclusion, learning strategies, and rigorous expectations, as well as strong staff perceptions of teachers and the working environment. At the same time, the data clearly identify areas requiring improvement, particularly student belonging, teacher-student relationships, engagement, fairness, school safety, self-efficacy, self-awareness, and self-management.

Empower views the identification of these challenges as an important outcome of establishing a meaningful SEL measurement system. Rather than relying on anecdotal perceptions of school culture, the school now possesses longitudinal data that can be used to establish measurable goals, target interventions, monitor implementation, and evaluate progress.

Going forward, Empower intends to use these established survey measures to set explicit improvement targets for SEL and culture/climate outcomes and to evaluate the effectiveness of its student-support and culture-building strategies. This approach will allow the school to more clearly connect its mission-specific commitments to defined measures, established baselines, measurable targets, and documented student outcomes during the next charter term.

Document upload – supporting evidence

File 1

File name: sel student survey.pdf
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File 2

File name: student culture and climate survey.pdf
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File 3

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(d)Provide a narrative on any initiatives undertaken at the school to address academic achievement shortfalls. Please link any such initiatives to measures in the Performance Framework.

Empower Schools of Alabama has undertaken a series of targeted academic initiatives designed to address the achievement and proficiency shortfalls identified in the Renewal Performance Report. These efforts are particularly responsive to the Academic Proficiency, Academic Growth, and State and Federal Accountability measures of the Performance Framework. The initiatives reflect a deliberate strategy to strengthen core instruction, provide targeted intervention for students performing below grade level, improve the use of assessment data, and increase instructional rigor.

Performance Framework Measures: Academic Proficiency – Mathematics; Academic Growth; State and Federal Accountability

Mathematics has been identified as Empower's most significant academic priority. The Renewal Performance Report specifically notes that mathematics proficiency, although improving, remained dramatically below the state average and below the surrounding school system. In response, Empower has strengthened its mathematics instructional program through the implementation of Curriculum Associates/i-Ready Classroom Mathematics in grades K–5, alignment with Alabama Numeracy Act expectations, targeted mathematics intervention, and increased professional development focused on effective mathematics instruction.

At the middle-grades level, Empower has expanded its partnership with A+ College Ready for grades 6–8 to increase rigor, strengthen standards-aligned instruction, and better prepare students for advanced coursework as they transition to high school.

These initiatives are beginning to correspond with measurable improvement. Mathematics proficiency increased from 0% in SY2022–23 to 1.42% in SY2023–24, 2.16% in SY2024–25, and 6.8% in SY2025–26. Although mathematics proficiency remains substantially below Empower's desired level, the SY2025–26 increase of 4.64 percentage points represents meaningful movement in the area identified as the school's greatest academic challenge. This work directly addresses the Academic Proficiency measure while supporting continued improvement under Academic Growth and State and Federal Accountability.

Performance Framework Measures: Academic Proficiency – ELA; Academic Growth; State and Federal Accountability

Empower has also prioritized strengthening literacy instruction, particularly in the elementary grades. The Renewal Performance Report shows that Empower has consistently performed above the surrounding system in ELA while remaining below the statewide average.

To address this gap, Empower has strengthened its literacy program through structured literacy practices and evidence-based resources, including Amplify in grades K–5, UFLI, Heggerty, and Phonics First, along with support from an Alabama Reading Initiative reading coach. The school has placed increased emphasis on foundational literacy skills, Science of Reading practices, early identification of reading deficiencies, and targeted intervention for students who are not meeting grade-level expectations.

These efforts are aligned directly with the Academic Proficiency – ELA measure and are intended to improve both proficiency and student growth. ELA proficiency increased from 30.22% in SY2023–24 to 32.9% in SY2024–25 and 35.9% in SY2025–26, providing evidence of continued improvement. This progress is particularly important when considered alongside the substantial growth of Empower's student population and the changing composition of its annual testing cohorts.

Performance Framework Measures: Academic Growth; Academic Proficiency

Because many students enroll at Empower performing below grade-level expectations, the school has increased its focus on targeted intervention and acceleration. This includes dedicated intervention support, small-group instruction, differentiated instruction, Power Hour/intervention periods, and additional instructional support for students demonstrating significant academic deficits.

The purpose of this work is not simply remediation. Intervention is intended to close foundational skill gaps while ensuring students continue to receive access to grade-level standards and rigorous instruction. This approach is particularly relevant to the Academic Growth measure because students entering several grade levels behind may demonstrate significant progress before reaching the state's proficiency threshold.

The Renewal Performance Report demonstrates the importance of this approach. Empower's overall Academic Growth rating moved from “Does Not Meet” in SY2023–24 to “Exceeds” in SY2024–25, with ELA growth of 8.9%, mathematics growth of 52.1%, and science growth of 112.5%.

Performance Framework Measures: Academic Growth; Academic Proficiency; State and Federal Accountability

Empower has expanded its use of interim, benchmark, and diagnostic assessments to identify student needs before the annual state assessment. The school's assessment system includes measures such as NWEA MAP, DIBELS, i-Ready diagnostic information, standards-based common assessments, and other interim assessment data.

These assessments are used to identify skill gaps, establish instructional groups, determine intervention needs, monitor student progress, and evaluate whether students are responding to instruction. Teachers and school leaders participate in data analysis processes to identify standards requiring reteaching and students requiring additional support.

This initiative is directly connected to both Academic Proficiency and Academic Growth, as more frequent monitoring allows the school to intervene earlier rather than waiting until statewide assessment results become available.

Performance Framework Measures: Academic Proficiency; Academic Growth

Empower has strengthened expectations for Tier I instruction across both campuses. Instructional non-negotiables include bell-to-bell instruction, standards-aligned learning targets/"I Can" statements, small-group instruction, exit tickets, increased opportunities for higher-order thinking, lesson internalization, and consistent progress monitoring.

The school has also strengthened its instructional observation and feedback processes through tools and frameworks including the Instructional Practice Guide, Get Better Faster, the Empower Education Excellence Framework (Evaluation System), and ELEOT. An instructional coach provides additional support to teachers across campuses.

These initiatives are intended to ensure that intervention does not become the primary strategy for addressing achievement gaps. Strong Tier I instruction remains the first line of response, with intervention providing additional support when students require it.

Performance Framework Measures: Academic Proficiency; Academic Growth

Empower has increased professional learning aligned to identified areas of academic need. Professional development has focused on literacy, mathematics, standards alignment, instructional rigor, intervention and acceleration, lesson internalization, data analysis, and effective small-group instruction.

Instructional coaching provides teachers with ongoing feedback and support in translating professional development into classroom practice. At the middle-school level, participation in A+ College Ready also provides teachers with curriculum-specific professional development intended to strengthen content knowledge and increase instructional rigor.

Performance Framework Measure: State and Federal Accountability

Empower has also focused on improving student attendance because students cannot benefit fully from strengthened curriculum, intervention, and instructional practices if they are not consistently present for instruction. The Renewal Performance Report identifies chronic absenteeism as a particular area of success, noting a steady decline during the charter period. By SY2024–25, Empower's chronic absenteeism rate was less than half the district comparison rate.

Chronic absenteeism decreased from 22.45 in SY2022–23 to 19.28 in SY2023–24 and 9.84 in SY2024–25. This improvement directly supports the State and Federal Accountability measure while increasing students' access to the instructional and intervention initiatives designed to improve achievement.

Empower's response to academic achievement shortfalls is intentionally multifaceted. The school recognizes that improving proficiency requires more than preparation for the annual state assessment. Consequently, Empower has focused on strengthening core curriculum and instruction, literacy and mathematics programming, intervention and acceleration, assessment and data analysis, instructional coaching, professional development, and student attendance.

These initiatives are principally aligned to three Academic Performance Framework measures: Academic Proficiency, by increasing the percentage of students meeting grade-level standards in ELA, mathematics, and science; Academic Growth, by accelerating the progress of students regardless of their starting achievement level; and State and Federal Accountability, by improving achievement, growth, attendance, and other components contributing to overall accountability performance.

The available results demonstrate encouraging movement. Empower earned an "Exceeds" rating for Academic Growth in SY2024–25, returned to "Meets" for State and Federal Accountability, and subsequently experienced SY2025–26 proficiency increases in all three tested subjects: ELA to

35.9%, mathematics to 6.8%, and science to 24.5%. While significant work remains, particularly in mathematics proficiency, the combination of stronger instructional systems and improving student outcomes provides evidence that Empower has established targeted strategies to address the academic shortfalls identified through the Performance Framework.

Documents upload – supporting evidence

File 1

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File 2

File name: Empower_Teacher_Evaluation_System.pdf
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File 3

File name: Empower_Support_Staff_Evaluation_System.pdf
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(e) If desired, supply any further evidence, not outlined above, that provides context and clarity on the academic performance of the school. This section is optional.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

3. Financial Performance

Status: Completed

Form Result

Financial Performance

This section provides an opportunity to describe the school's financial performance over the years reviewed. Schools should reference the evidence contained in the financial section of the school's Renewal Performance Report and give context on the metrics contained therein. Schools may submit evidence that is not contained in the Renewal Performance Report that enhance or explain the financial health and sustainability of the school.

(a)Using the measures contained in the financial portion of the Performance Framework, provide a narrative on the near-term financial health and financial sustainability of the school. Please reference only evidence from the Renewal Performance Report.

Empower Schools of Alabama's financial performance over the charter term reflects an organization that experienced financial pressure during its early years of operation but subsequently demonstrated meaningful improvement in both near-term financial health and longer-term financial sustainability. The Renewal Performance Report evaluates these areas separately, with near-term financial health focused primarily on the school's ability to meet its immediate obligations and financial sustainability focused on its financial position and viability over time.

Overall, the Renewal Performance Report shows a clear improvement trajectory. The summary ratings identify Near-Term Financial Health as “Meets” for SY2025–26 and Financial Sustainability as “Meets” for both SY2024–25 and SY2025–26.

The Renewal Performance Report determines the Near-Term Financial Health rating primarily through Debt Default and Days Cash, with Current Ratio considered in borderline cases. Under the report’s methodology, the indicator is rated “Meets” when there is no debt default and Days Cash is 60 days or greater. Alternatively, the indicator may meet expectations when there is no debt default, Days Cash exceeds 30 days, and the Current Ratio exceeds 10. Revenue-to-budget ratio, expense-to-budget ratio, and average daily cost per pupil are identified as informational measures.

Empower’s near-term financial results demonstrate considerable fluctuation during the contract period, particularly during the school’s early years. The report shows that Empower opened with cash reserves that were spent down during the opening year and ended FY2023 with no cash on hand, although the school had more than \$700,000 in receivables.

The report further explains that enrollment growth from 131 students in FY2023 to 255 students in FY2024 assisted the school’s financial recovery. Empower ended FY2024 with a positive cash position, although receivables had increased to more than \$1.5 million. By the end of FY2025, Empower had reduced those receivables to slightly more than \$200,000, generating a larger cash position and moving the school to a “Meets” expectation status.

Days Cash provides one of the clearest indicators of this improvement. Management-prepared financial data in the Renewal Performance Report show Days Cash of -13 days at FY2023 year-end, 9 days at FY2024 year-end, 87 days at FY2025 year-end, and 73 days at the FY2026 P6 reporting point. The same data show that Empower had no debt default during any reporting period presented.

The Current Ratio also remained strong in the most recent reporting periods. The report identifies a Current Ratio of 8.5 at FY2025 year-end and 17.5 at FY2026 P6.

The audited-data section provides additional confirmation of the school’s improvement. Using audited financial statements, Empower’s Current Ratio was 1.4 in FY2023, 4.3 in FY2024, and 3.7 in FY2025. Audited Days Cash increased from 3.1 days in FY2023 and 4.8 days in FY2024 to 84 days in FY2025. Consequently, the audited Near-Term Indicator moved from “Does Not Meet” in FY2023 and FY2024 to “Meets” in FY2025.

These results demonstrate that Empower did not consistently meet near-term expectations throughout the entire charter term. The school experienced genuine liquidity challenges during its early years. However, the most recent evidence contained in the Renewal Performance Report demonstrates substantial improvement, particularly in cash reserves, receivables management, Current Ratio, and Days Cash.

The Renewal Performance Report defines the Sustainability Indicator as a measure of the school’s financial position and viability over the contract period. The indicator considers financial obligations and trends over time and is determined primarily by Total Margin and the aggregated three-year margin, with the Debt-to-Asset Ratio providing additional information in borderline cases. Under the report’s methodology, the Sustainability Indicator is rated “Meets” when either the Total Margin or three-year aggregated margin meets or exceeds 2%.

The audited financial measures demonstrate a substantial improvement in Empower’s operating results. The Renewal Performance Report identifies a -14.8% Total Margin in FY2023, followed by a 16.1% Total Margin in FY2024 and a positive 4.2% Total Margin in FY2025. By FY2025, the school also had a positive three-year aggregated margin of 5.2%.

Accordingly, Empower's audited Sustainability Indicator improved from "Does Not Meet" in FY2023 to "Meets" in FY2024 and FY2025. This improvement is significant because it demonstrates that the school's financial recovery was not limited solely to its cash balance. Empower also moved from a substantial negative operating margin in FY2023 to positive margins in each of the following two audited fiscal years.

The Debt-to-Asset Ratio presents an area that continues to warrant monitoring. According to the audited measures, the ratio was 0.95 in FY2023, improved to 0.85 in FY2024, and increased to 0.92 in FY2025. The Renewal Performance Report specifically notes that the ratio moved below the 0.90 threshold in FY2024, providing the school with equity for borrowing if needed, before rising slightly above the threshold in FY2025.

Therefore, although the overall Sustainability Indicator meets expectations, the FY2025 Debt-to-Asset Ratio indicates that Empower should continue monitoring the relationship between its assets and liabilities. The Renewal Performance Report does not characterize the FY2025 ratio as evidence that the school is financially unsustainable; rather, the overall audited Sustainability Indicator remains "Meets."

The financial evidence contained in the Renewal Performance Report demonstrates a distinct progression across the charter term. Empower's early financial challenges included the use of opening cash reserves, low year-end cash balances, significant receivables, and a negative FY2023 Total Margin. These conditions resulted in periods when the school did not meet the Performance Framework's expectations for near-term financial health and sustainability.

The later years of the contract period show substantial improvement. Receivables were reduced from more than \$1.5 million in FY2024 to just over \$200,000 by FY2025, the school developed a larger cash position, audited Days Cash increased to 84 days, the audited Current Ratio reached 3.7, and the school produced positive Total Margins in FY2024 and FY2025.

The most recent management-prepared data further support the continuation of that positive trajectory, showing 73 Days Cash, a 17.5 Current Ratio, and no debt default at FY2026 P6, resulting in a Near-Term Financial Health rating of "Meets."

It is also important to recognize the Renewal Performance Report's caution regarding the timing and interpretation of financial data. The report states that audited financial statements provide the more holistic picture of the school's financial position, while management-prepared statements are used to provide a more current view because audits may lag. The report further notes that the timing of supplementary state allocations near the end of the fiscal year may create fluctuations in financial metrics.

Based solely on the evidence contained in the Renewal Performance Report, Empower's financial performance is best characterized as an early period of financial vulnerability followed by significant recovery and improved financial stability. The most recent available evidence indicates that Empower meets expectations for both Near-Term Financial Health and Financial Sustainability. At the same time, the report identifies the Debt-to-Asset Ratio as an area that should continue to be monitored as the organization manages its obligations and future growth.

This trajectory demonstrates that while Empower has not met every financial expectation during every year of the charter term, the school has demonstrated the capacity to respond to early financial challenges, improve liquidity, strengthen operating performance, reduce outstanding receivables, and move both major financial indicators into "Meets" status in the most recent reporting periods.

(b)Provide any supplemental evidence or documentation on the financial health and sustainability of the school. Please provide context for the evidence.

In addition to the financial measures summarized in the Renewal Performance Report, Empower Schools of Alabama can provide supplemental financial documentation that gives additional context regarding the organization's liquidity, operating performance, financial controls, cash-flow management, and ability to sustain operations throughout the renewal period. This evidence is especially useful because the Renewal Performance Report itself explains that financial ratios calculated at interim points can fluctuate significantly during the fiscal year and that audited financial statements provide a more holistic view of financial position.

One of the strongest pieces of supplemental evidence is Empower's annual independent financial audits. The Renewal Performance Report confirms that the financial audits for FY2023, FY2024, and FY2025 were unmodified and contained no findings.

These audits provide important independent evidence regarding the reliability of the school's financial reporting and internal financial practices. The absence of audit findings across three consecutive fiscal years supports the conclusion that, although Empower experienced challenges with liquidity during the early portion of the charter term, there were not corresponding audit findings indicating material weaknesses or significant deficiencies in the financial statements.

Empower should therefore attach the FY2023, FY2024, and FY2025 independent audit reports, with particular emphasis on the most recent audit. The Renewal Performance Report itself notes that audited statements provide a more comprehensive view because long-term debt, facility obligations, pension/OPEB obligations, and other items may not be fully reflected in interim management-prepared statements.

The most recent available financial statements provide additional context for Empower's improved liquidity. FY2025 financial documentation shows \$1,723,546 in cash and cash equivalents and \$2,004,209 in total current assets, compared with \$543,131 in current liabilities.

These figures help explain the audited Current Ratio of 3.7 identified in the Renewal Performance Report. The same audited-data analysis reports 84 Days Cash on Hand in FY2025, moving the school's Near-Term Indicator from "Does Not Meet" in FY2023 and FY2024 to "Meets" in FY2025.

This evidence is particularly important because it demonstrates that Empower's improved near-term financial rating was supported by an actual increase in liquid resources relative to current obligations rather than solely by a technical change in the calculation methodology.

Empower should also provide its current-year monthly financial statements and a supplemental Days Cash on Hand schedule to demonstrate why the school's liquidity position may fluctuate substantially during the fiscal year.

The Renewal Performance Report expressly acknowledges that near-term measures capture financial health at specific points in time and that the metrics may "vary significantly throughout the fiscal year." It further notes that supplementary state allocations received toward the end of the fiscal year can introduce fluctuations in the financial metrics.

Empower's current-year experience illustrates this issue. Days Cash on Hand was approximately 73 days at the March 2026 reporting point, subsequently approximately 58 days based on June 2026 financial information, and was expected to increase again following the receipt of significant A&T and Charter Line Item funding during July and August. This movement demonstrates why an interim Days Cash figure should be reviewed alongside the timing of scheduled state revenues and the school's full-year cash-flow cycle rather than interpreted in isolation.

For that reason, a supplemental monthly cash-flow analysis from October 2025 through fiscal year-end would provide valuable context. The schedule should show beginning cash, revenue

receipts, expenditures, ending cash, and calculated Days Cash on Hand by month. This would allow the Commission to see both the fluctuations and the underlying revenue timing responsible for those movements.

Accounts receivable documentation can also demonstrate improved financial management. The Renewal Performance Report notes that Empower ended FY2023 with more than \$700,000 in receivables and that receivables subsequently grew to more than \$1.5 million in FY2024. By the end of FY2025, however, Empower had reduced receivables to just over \$200,000, which contributed to the school's larger cash position and movement into "Meets" status.

The FY2025 financial statements similarly show accounts receivable of approximately \$230,286 at September 30, 2025.

A year-end or current accounts receivable aging report would therefore be useful supplemental evidence. It would demonstrate that the organization has improved the conversion of earned revenue into available cash and is not relying on unusually large outstanding receivable balances to support its reported financial position.

Empower should also provide supporting documentation for its improved operating margins. The Renewal Performance Report's audited analysis shows a -14.8% Total Margin in FY2023, 16.1% in FY2024, and 4.2% in FY2025, with an aggregated three-year margin of 5.2% in FY2025. The Sustainability Indicator consequently moved from "Does Not Meet" in FY2023 to "Meets" in FY2024 and FY2025.

This is important evidence of sustainability because it demonstrates that the school did not simply increase cash through borrowing or temporary revenue timing. Empower moved from an operating deficit during its early period to positive audited operating margins during the subsequent two fiscal years.

A supplemental three- to five-year financial trend schedule showing revenues, expenditures, annual surplus/deficit, Total Margin, cash balance, Days Cash, Current Ratio, and enrollment would make this recovery particularly clear to reviewers.

Enrollment information is also relevant financial evidence because public charter school revenue is strongly connected to student enrollment. The Renewal Performance Report explains that enrollment growth from 131 students in FY2023 to 255 students in FY2024 helped Empower recover financially.

Accordingly, Empower should connect its financial projections to the five-year enrollment plan included elsewhere in the renewal application. The school's proposed enrollment ranges should be incorporated into its multi-year budget so that projected staffing, facilities, transportation, Child Nutrition, and instructional costs increase responsibly as enrollment grows.

This is particularly important because Empower's future enrollment growth will depend on available facility space. The financial forecast should therefore distinguish between a base enrollment scenario that can be supported by existing capacity and an expanded enrollment scenario that occurs only when additional facility space becomes available.

Current and prior-year budget-to-actual reports provide additional evidence of sound financial management. The Renewal Performance Report indicates that the Board's financial oversight improved over the charter term. The Board approved only three of twelve monthly financial reports for FY2023, but this increased to nine of twelve in FY2024, eight of twelve in FY2025, and five of the first six available reports in FY2026.

The FY2025 financial documentation also confirms that the school adopted and submitted its annual budget and that expenditures cannot be budgeted in excess of estimated available revenues plus balances on hand.

Board-approved budgets, monthly financial statements, and Board minutes documenting financial review would therefore provide evidence not only of the school's financial condition but also of the governance structures used to monitor that condition.

[Empower End of Year Financials](#)

[Empower Monthly Financials](#)

Documents upload – financial health and sustainability evidence

File 1

File name: FY2023.pdf
Uploaded: 08/27/2026 03:27 PM
Uploaded by: Meredith Davis

File 2

File name: FY2024.pdf
Uploaded: 08/27/2026 03:27 PM
Uploaded by: Meredith Davis

File 3

File name: FY2025 (1).pdf
Uploaded: 08/27/2026 03:27 PM
Uploaded by: Meredith Davis

(c)Provide a narrative on financial flexibility, and the ability of the school to financially adjust for unanticipated opportunities or setbacks.

Empower Schools of Alabama recognizes that financial sustainability requires more than the ability to meet current obligations. The organization must also maintain sufficient financial flexibility to respond to unexpected challenges, changes in enrollment or funding, urgent facility needs, staffing demands, and opportunities that may advance the school's mission.

The Renewal Performance Report evaluates Financial Flexibility separately from Near-Term Financial Health and Financial Sustainability. The report identifies Financial Flexibility as an area rated "Approaches" in each year of the review period, indicating that while Empower has demonstrated the ability to operate and recover financially, its flexibility to absorb significant unforeseen changes remains more limited than its near-term liquidity and sustainability indicators.

The report explains that the Financial Flexibility indicator is intended to summarize a school's ability to financially adjust for unanticipated opportunities or setbacks and that the primary measure is the percentage of revenue derived from state and federal sources. This measure is important because organizations that depend heavily on a limited number of public funding streams may have less flexibility to absorb unexpected reductions in revenue or redirect funds quickly when new needs arise.

Empower's experience during the charter term demonstrates both the importance of financial flexibility and the organization's capacity to respond when financial conditions change. The school experienced significant financial pressure during its early operating years, including low cash balances and large receivable amounts. However, Empower subsequently improved its financial position by increasing enrollment, reducing outstanding receivables, strengthening cash reserves,

and producing positive operating margins. The Renewal Performance Report notes that receivables were reduced from more than \$1.5 million in FY2024 to just over \$200,000 by the end of FY2025, contributing to a stronger cash position.

The school's improved liquidity provides some additional capacity to respond to unforeseen circumstances. Audited FY2025 measures show a Current Ratio of 3.7 and 84 Days Cash on Hand, while the school's Total Margin remained positive and its three-year aggregated margin was 5.2%. These results demonstrate that Empower has strengthened the financial foundation from which it can respond to short-term needs.

At the same time, the "Approaches" rating for Financial Flexibility remains an important consideration. Empower's revenue model continues to depend substantially on state and federal public funding, which can restrict how quickly funds may be redirected and can expose the school to changes in enrollment, appropriations, grant availability, or the timing of state revenue distributions. For this reason, Empower does not view improved cash reserves alone as sufficient evidence that financial flexibility is fully developed.

Going forward, Empower intends to strengthen financial flexibility through several strategies. These include maintaining a stronger unrestricted cash position, building and preserving operating reserves, aligning annual budgets closely with realistic enrollment projections, monitoring recurring expenditures, reducing reliance on external vendor contracts where internal capacity can be developed efficiently, and pursuing grant and philanthropic opportunities that support strategic priorities without creating unsustainable recurring obligations.

Facility planning is another major component of financial flexibility. Because future enrollment growth depends upon available facility space, Empower must be able to respond to opportunities to expand or secure additional space without jeopardizing operating stability. The organization will therefore continue to evaluate facility-related decisions within the context of cash reserves, debt obligations, annual operating margins, and projected enrollment revenue.

Empower will also continue to monitor expenditures carefully so that available resources can be redirected when unexpected needs arise. This is particularly important in areas such as transportation, Child Nutrition, special education, technology, staffing, safety, and facilities, where operational needs can change quickly.

Overall, the Renewal Performance Report indicates that Empower has improved its financial foundation but still has work to do in strengthening true financial flexibility. The school's recent improvement in cash reserves, receivables management, Current Ratio, and operating margins demonstrates an increased ability to absorb short-term pressures. However, the continued "Approaches" rating appropriately reflects the need to diversify and protect available resources so that the organization can respond to setbacks or opportunities without placing the core educational program at risk.

During the renewal term, success in this area will be demonstrated by Empower's ability to maintain adequate cash reserves, sustain positive operating performance, carefully manage debt and recurring obligations, align growth with facility and staffing capacity, and preserve sufficient unrestricted resources to respond when circumstances change.

(d)Provide a narrative on the governing board oversight of financial matters. Describe the information that the governing board is provided, and the internal controls in place to ensure the integrity of the information.

Empower Schools of Alabama's governing Board holds fiduciary responsibility for the financial health, stewardship, and long-term sustainability of the organization. Board oversight includes review and approval of the annual budget, consideration of recurring financial reports, review of major contracts and financial commitments, monitoring of the school's financial condition, and receipt of

independent audit information. The Renewal Performance Report reflects both areas of improvement and areas where Board financial oversight has required greater consistency over the contract term.

The Renewal Performance Report shows that Board financial oversight strengthened over time. Board minutes confirm budget hearings for FY2023, FY2025, and FY2026 and Board approval of those budgets. The report also notes that the Board reviewed only 3 of 12 monthly financial reports in FY2023, increasing to 9 of 12 in FY2024, 8 of 12 in FY2025, and 5 of the first 6 available reports in FY2026. The report further identifies evidence that the Board considered contracts. This progression demonstrates improved regularity of financial review, while also reinforcing the need for consistent monthly oversight throughout the renewal term.

The Board is provided financial information intended to allow members to evaluate both the school's current financial condition and its performance against the approved budget. This information includes the annual operating budget, monthly financial statements, budget-to-actual information, cash position, revenues and expenditures, accounts payable and receivable information, significant contracts, and information regarding major financial commitments or facility-related obligations.

The purpose of these reports is to provide Board members with sufficient information to determine whether actual financial performance remains aligned with the approved budget, whether revenues are being received as anticipated, whether expenditures are within available resources, and whether corrective action may be needed.

The Renewal Performance Report emphasizes the importance of periodic financial reports, annual budgets, and independent audits as core components of financial oversight. It explains that financial reporting requirements include complete and timely submission of annual budgets, revised budgets when applicable, periodic financial reports, annual independent audits, and reporting associated with the use of public funds.

In addition to monthly operating information, the Board receives the results of the school's annual independent financial audit. This provides an external review of the integrity of the school's financial statements and accounting practices. The Renewal Performance Report confirms that Empower's FY2023, FY2024, and FY2025 audits were unmodified and contained no findings. This independent validation provides an important additional safeguard beyond management-prepared financial reports.

The Board's financial oversight role is distinct from the daily management of the school's finances. School leadership and financial staff are responsible for day-to-day accounting, purchasing, accounts payable and receivable, payroll coordination, reconciliations, and preparation of financial information. The Board's role is to review the results of those processes, ask questions, approve major financial decisions, and hold leadership accountable for the organization's financial condition.

During monthly financial reviews, Board members can assess areas such as budget variances, changes in cash balances, unexpected expenditures, revenue trends, debt obligations, enrollment-related revenue assumptions, and the organization's overall ability to meet short- and long-term financial commitments. This provides an opportunity for the Board to question material variances and require explanations or corrective action when necessary.

The Renewal Performance Report identifies Governance within Financial Management and Oversight as improving from "Does Not Meet" in FY2023 and FY2024 to "Meets" in FY2025 and FY2026. This improvement reflects a stronger level of Board participation in budgeting and financial review during the later years of the charter term.

At the same time, Empower acknowledges the remaining observations in the Renewal Performance Report. The report states that there was no evidence in the reviewed Board minutes of an RFP

process and limited evidence of Board oversight related to personnel positions, salaries, and benefits. During the renewal period, Empower will continue strengthening documentation of these actions so that the official Board record more clearly demonstrates the financial oversight that is occurring.

Empower maintains internal controls designed to help ensure that financial transactions are authorized, documented, appropriately coded, reconciled, and reviewed before they ultimately appear in the financial reports provided to the governing Board.

A central principle of these controls is separation of duties. For example, Empower's Purchasing Card policy separates the responsibilities of the employee making a purchase, the administrator reviewing and approving the purchase, the Finance and Human Resources Coordinator responsible for administering the program and reviewing reconciliations, and the Executive Director who provides overall oversight and approves exceptions. The policy specifically provides that an employee should not approve his or her own Purchasing Card transactions.

This structure helps reduce the likelihood that a single individual can initiate, approve, and reconcile the same transaction without independent review.

Purchases are also subject to approval requirements. Before approval, reviewers are expected to verify that the expenditure is necessary, supported by available budget funds, compliant with school policy, and appropriate for school operations.

Empower's purchasing controls also require supporting documentation and monthly reconciliation. Purchasing Card transactions must be supported by the statement, itemized receipts, documentation of the business purpose, required approvals, and a Missing Receipt Form when applicable. The Finance and Human Resources Coordinator reviews each reconciliation for completeness and compliance prior to final approval.

The purpose of monthly reconciliation is to verify that transactions are accurate, properly approved, adequately documented, charged to the appropriate budget, and correctly recorded in the school's accounting records.

These transaction-level controls are important because the accuracy of the financial statements reviewed by the Board ultimately depends on the quality of the underlying accounting records.

Empower also maintains record-retention requirements for financial documentation. Required records include monthly statements, receipts, invoices, approvals, reconciliation reports, cardholder agreements, and audit documentation, with records maintained securely and access limited to authorized personnel.

Internal controls also include ongoing monitoring for potentially irregular transactions. Purchasing activity is periodically reviewed for matters such as unusual purchasing patterns, duplicate transactions, split purchases, unauthorized purchases, missing documentation, and transactions exceeding established limits. The school retains the right to audit purchasing transactions when necessary.

The policy also establishes procedures for reporting suspected fraud, misuse, theft, or abuse. These safeguards contribute to the reliability of the transaction data that eventually flow into the school's financial reporting system.

Independent audits serve as another important layer of financial control. The Renewal Performance Report explains that clean audits provide evidence that financial statements are accurate and complete and that authorizers should pay particular attention to findings involving material weaknesses or significant internal-control deficiencies.

For Empower, the fact that the FY2023, FY2024, and FY2025 financial audits were unmodified and contained no findings provides important external evidence regarding the integrity of the school's financial reporting and underlying financial-management systems.

ALSDE Compliance Monitoring also found no findings related to Empower's financial policies during SY2023–24. While the monitoring process did identify concerns related to the timeliness and public availability of financial reporting, those concerns were related to reporting and documentation rather than findings of financial mismanagement.

Empower recognizes that effective financial governance requires both sound internal financial controls and visible, well-documented Board oversight. During the renewal period, the organization intends to further strengthen this work by ensuring consistent monthly Board review of financial statements, clearer documentation of Board consideration of contracts and procurement processes, timely presentation of budget amendments when necessary, and more explicit Board review of significant staffing and compensation decisions that have material financial implications.

The organization will also continue strengthening the timeliness of financial reporting and public posting of required financial documents. The Renewal Performance Report identified Financial Reporting as an area rated "Approaches" in the later years of the review period even while Financial Policies continued to receive "Meets." This distinction reinforces the importance of maintaining strong controls internally while also ensuring that financial information is timely, accessible, and clearly documented.

Overall, Empower's system of financial governance is designed to create multiple layers of accountability: transaction-level approval and documentation; segregation of duties; reconciliation and monitoring; leadership review; governing Board review and approval; and annual independent audit. Together, these controls help ensure that the financial information provided to the Board is sufficiently reliable for the Board to fulfill its fiduciary responsibility, protect public resources, and make informed decisions regarding the short- and long-term financial health of Empower Schools of Alabama.

(e)Please comment on any findings found in the most recent financial audit or findings over the contract term from the ALSDE Compliance Monitoring on financial matters.

Over the charter contract term, Empower Schools of Alabama has demonstrated a strong record with respect to its independent financial audits. The Renewal Performance Report states that the financial audits for FY2023, FY2024, and FY2025 were unmodified and contained no findings. This provides important evidence that the school's audited financial statements did not result in findings requiring corrective action during the review period.

Similarly, the 2023–24 ALSDE Compliance Monitoring review did not identify findings related to Empower's financial policies. The Renewal Performance Report specifically notes that the ALSDE compliance monitoring conducted during SY2023–24 had no findings regarding financial policies and that the FY2023 and FY2024 audits likewise produced no findings in this area.

The ALSDE monitoring did, however, identify concerns related to financial reporting within the LEA Accounting section. Specifically, the Renewal Performance Report states that the SY2023–24 compliance monitoring identified late reporting of end-of-year financial information and outdated financial information on the school's website. Importantly, these concerns related to the timeliness and public availability of financial reporting rather than findings of financial mismanagement or inappropriate expenditure of funds.

Empower recognizes the importance of timely financial reporting and has worked to strengthen its processes for ensuring that required financial information is prepared, submitted, reviewed, and made publicly available. This includes greater attention to the timely posting of current financial information and ensuring that financial reporting responsibilities are incorporated into regular district-level

monitoring. These improvements are particularly important as Empower continues to strengthen its internal business operations and financial oversight.

The Renewal Performance Report also documents improvement in the availability of financial information through subsequent Virtual Compliance Monitoring reviews. In Spring 2025, reviewers were unable to locate updated financial statements, a check register, an audit, or a budget. By Summer 2025, updated financial statements and check registers were available, although an audit and FY2026 budget were not located. By Spring 2026, the fiscal-year budget, updated financial statements, and check registers were available, although the audit was still not located through the review process. This progression demonstrates improvement while also identifying financial-document accessibility as an area requiring continued attention.

Board financial oversight has also strengthened over the contract term. The Renewal Performance Report notes that only 3 of 12 monthly financial reports were reviewed in FY2023, compared with 9 of 12 in FY2024, 8 of 12 in FY2025, and 5 of the first 6 available reports in FY2026. Although this demonstrates substantial improvement from the earlier years of the contract, Empower recognizes the importance of ensuring consistent Board review and approval of financial reports throughout each fiscal year.

With respect to the ALSDE fiscal review associated with IDEA Part B, the available Compliance Monitoring documentation reflects review of areas including Single Audit requirements, written financial management policies and procedures, application for funds, proportionate share, Coordinated Early Intervening Services, and Maintenance of Effort. The documentation reflects affirmative responses for these fiscal-review items.

Overall, the financial findings over the contract term are best characterized as financial reporting and documentation-timeliness concerns rather than audit findings involving the accuracy or integrity of Empower's financial statements. The distinction is important. Empower's independent audits for FY2023, FY2024, and FY2025 were all unmodified with no findings, while the primary financial concern identified through ALSDE Compliance Monitoring involved late end-of-year reporting and outdated financial information being available on the website.

Empower has used these findings to strengthen its financial reporting processes and recognizes that continued improvement is necessary. During the renewal term, the school will continue emphasizing timely completion and submission of required financial reports, regular updating of publicly required financial documents, consistent Board review of monthly financial statements, maintenance of appropriate financial policies and internal controls, and ongoing monitoring of state and federal fiscal requirements.

The absence of findings in three consecutive independent financial audits, combined with the absence of ALSDE findings related to financial policies, provides evidence of a sound underlying financial-management structure. At the same time, Empower acknowledges the financial-reporting concerns identified during compliance monitoring and will continue strengthening the administrative systems necessary to ensure that the quality of its financial reporting and public transparency is consistent with the quality reflected in its independent audits.

(f)Describe all fund-raising goals established by the governing board over the contract term, and the support in place to meet those goals. Provide a narrative on all substantive donations and grants over the contract term and the school need addressed by these funds (\$20,000 or more during a fiscal year, indicate if the funds were earmarked for a specific purpose). A list of all substantive donations and grants obtained over the contract term is requested in the exhibits section.

Over the charter contract term, Empower Schools of Alabama has used fundraising, grants, philanthropic partnerships, and other non-public revenue sources to supplement public funding and address needs that could not always be fully supported through the regular operating budget.

These resources have supported areas such as academic programming, mental health and student services, professional development, facility development, enrichment, and organizational growth.

The available records do not reflect that the governing Board established a single fixed annual dollar fundraising requirement during each of the earlier years of the charter term. Rather, fundraising and grant development were generally opportunity- and need-driven, with leadership pursuing grants and partnerships aligned to specific school priorities. As Empower has matured, however, the organization has begun moving toward a more formal, Board-monitored philanthropic strategy that establishes measurable fundraising expectations and ties external resource development directly to long-term strategic priorities.

Empower's current strategic planning process formalizes fundraising as an important component of long-term financial sustainability. The strategic plan identifies diversification of revenue through strategic philanthropy as a financial priority and calls for a multi-year development strategy, cultivation of corporate and foundation relationships, and a capital campaign to support facility expansion.

The plan also establishes measurable philanthropic targets. Within the Community Engagement and Equity priority, the school identifies cumulative philanthropic-support goals of \$1 million, \$3 million, and ultimately \$5 million or more, with fundraising intended to support equitable access to resources and long-term facility development. Facility planning similarly identifies cumulative facility financing and philanthropy targets of \$1 million committed, \$3 million secured, and \$5 million or more, alongside the launch of a multi-year capital campaign for a permanent campus.

The draft strategic planning documents currently contain two formulations regarding the annual number of grant applications. One section identifies a goal of 5–10 high-impact applications annually, while another identifies 10–12 targeted applications annually. Before final Board adoption, Empower should select one consistent annual target for inclusion in the final strategic plan and renewal exhibits.

This shift represents an important evolution from pursuing individual funding opportunities as they arise toward establishing a deliberate development function with measurable annual and multi-year expectations.

Empower's fundraising strategy is intended to be supported through coordinated efforts among the governing Board, Executive Director, district leadership, community partners, and external organizations. The Board's role is to provide strategic oversight, approve major initiatives, monitor progress toward philanthropic goals, and support relationship-building within the broader community.

The strategic plan specifically identifies several infrastructure components to support this work, including a Fundraising & Grant Strategy Playbook, Grant Calendar & Pipeline Tracker, Donor Stewardship & Reporting Templates, Capital Campaign Case for Support, Community Partnership Development Playbook, and Capital Campaign Operations Guide. These tools are intended to move fundraising from an informal or reactive process into a systematic development strategy with clearly identified opportunities, application deadlines, responsible personnel, reporting requirements, and stewardship expectations.

Empower also intends to cultivate relationships with businesses, banks, nonprofit organizations, foundations, and other community and philanthropic partners as part of its broader community-engagement strategy.

Based on the grant information maintained by Empower during the renewal preparation process, two clearly identified awards exceeding the requested \$20,000 threshold should be highlighted in this section and included in the exhibit schedule.

Quality Seats Fund – \$100,000. Empower received approximately \$100,000 through the Quality Seats Fund. These funds were earmarked to strengthen school quality and support the continued development of Empower's educational program. The award provided additional resources at a time when the organization was experiencing substantial enrollment and programmatic growth. The funding helped Empower invest in initiatives intended to strengthen the quality and sustainability of the school model rather than requiring all expansion-related costs to be absorbed through unrestricted operating funds.

Goodrich Foundation – \$50,000. Empower received a \$50,000 grant from the Goodrich Foundation to strengthen the school's mental-health and student-support capacity. The funds were specifically connected to supporting a Mental Health Coordinator and related student mental-health services. This funding addressed a significant whole-child need by allowing Empower to expand its capacity to identify and respond to students' social-emotional, behavioral, and mental-health needs. The grant was therefore earmarked for a specific purpose rather than general operating support.

Empower has received and pursued other grants and external funding opportunities during the contract term, including support connected to professional development, academic programming, literacy and numeracy initiatives, Summer Boost programming, facility development, athletics/enrichment, and other school-improvement priorities. However, based on the records presently available for this response, the exact fiscal-year award amount for each of those grants has not been sufficiently verified to determine whether each individually meets the requested \$20,000 reporting threshold. Those awards should be added to the final exhibit only after the applicable award letters, grant agreements, or general-ledger records confirm the amount received within each fiscal year.

This distinction is important because Empower's audited financial statements account for grants and contributions according to their applicable restrictions and recognize grants, entitlements, and donations when eligibility requirements are satisfied. The financial statements also distinguish restricted or committed special-revenue resources from general operating funds and note that grant funds may be restricted to specific program purposes.

Empower has intentionally pursued external funding to address areas where philanthropic investment can accelerate implementation or expand opportunities without creating undue pressure on unrestricted operating resources. This has been especially important as the organization has grown rapidly and simultaneously experienced increased academic, mental-health, facility, staffing, transportation, and student-support needs.

Grant and philanthropic funding are therefore not viewed as substitutes for the school's core public funding. Instead, these resources allow Empower to enhance or accelerate priorities such as:

- student mental-health and whole-child supports;
- academic interventions and specialized programming;
- teacher and leadership professional development;
- student enrichment and extracurricular opportunities;
- school quality and program expansion; and
- facility improvement and future capacity development.

This approach is particularly important because Empower's financial statements acknowledge substantial dependence on federal and state governmental support and note that a significant reduction in those sources could affect school programs and activities. Diversifying revenue through philanthropy therefore contributes not only to program enhancement but also to the organization's broader goal of increasing financial flexibility.

Facility development represents the most significant future philanthropic need. Empower's continued enrollment demand creates a need for additional classroom, intervention, student-support, enrichment, and extracurricular space. As a result, the school's emerging fundraising strategy includes a

multi-year capital campaign intended to build philanthropic support for a permanent K–8 facility and related expansion needs.

This campaign is intended to complement, not replace, other facility financing mechanisms. The objective is to create a diversified financing structure that may include public resources, debt financing, grants, foundation support, corporate partnerships, and charitable contributions. This will allow Empower to respond to enrollment demand while avoiding excessive reliance on unrestricted operating reserves.

All substantive grants and donations are expected to be monitored according to the applicable award requirements. Restricted or earmarked funds are used only for their designated purposes, with expenditures tracked through the school's accounting structure and applicable grant-management processes. Empower's FY2025 financial statements specifically identify Special Revenue Funds as resources that are restricted or committed for particular purposes and note that applicable grant resources must be expended consistent with grant requirements.

The governing Board maintains oversight through its review of the annual budget, financial reports, significant contracts, and overall financial position. Where grant funding requires a budget amendment or creates a significant programmatic commitment, those financial implications should be incorporated into the school's budget and Board oversight processes.

Overall, Empower's fundraising history reflects an organization that initially pursued external resources primarily in response to identified school needs and has now begun transitioning toward a more structured, measurable, and strategic philanthropic model. The next stage of this work will focus on formalizing Board-monitored fundraising targets, strengthening the grant pipeline, cultivating long-term donor relationships, and launching a capital campaign capable of supporting the facility capacity necessary to meet continued family demand.

(g)Provide a narrative on all substantive loans or lines-of-credit obtained over the contract term (\$50,000 or more). Include information on the rationale for the obligations and the revenue streams to meet the obligations if identified. A list of all substantive loans or lines-of-credit is requested in the exhibits section.

Over the charter contract term, Empower Schools of Alabama has used debt strategically to support facility acquisition, facility improvements, and expansion of instructional capacity rather than to fund routine operating deficits. Because the school has experienced significant enrollment growth, access to appropriate facility space has been one of the organization's most pressing operational needs. Debt financing has therefore been used primarily to address capital needs that could not reasonably be absorbed through annual operating revenues without placing unnecessary pressure on the school's cash reserves.

The school's financial statements reflect that Empower Community Holdings, LLC was established specifically to support the acquisition and operation of school facilities and to obtain debt financing for the benefit of Empower Schools of Alabama. The Holdings entity is governed by a Board appointed by the school's governing Board, and its activities are consolidated within Empower's financial statements.

The principal long-term debt obligation reflected in Empower's audited financial information is a promissory note dated June 24, 2022. The debt was obtained in connection with the purchase and improvement of school facilities. The FY2025 financial statements specifically state that the school's long-term debt was incurred for the purchase and improvements of its facilities.

The promissory note carries an interest rate of 5.5%, is payable in monthly installments, matures on May 30, 2027, and is secured by assets of Empower Community Holdings, LLC. As of September 30, 2025, the outstanding principal balance was \$227,693, down from a beginning FY2025 balance of \$253,034 following \$25,341 in principal reductions during the year.

The scheduled remaining payments as of September 30, 2025 were approximately \$26,792 in principal and \$12,016 in interest during FY2026, followed by \$200,901 in principal and \$7,935 in interest during FY2027.

The rationale for this financing was directly tied to Empower's need to establish and improve appropriate facilities for its educational program. Rather than using unrestricted operating cash to absorb the full cost of facility acquisition and improvement at the beginning of operations, the debt allowed Empower to spread those capital costs across multiple years.

The primary revenue stream available to meet this obligation is Empower's general operating revenue, including state and local revenues generated through the school's enrollment. The FY2025 financial statements show more than \$7.2 million in total governmental-fund revenue and demonstrate that Empower's operating resources have increased as enrollment has grown. The financing structure therefore allows the school to support a long-term facility asset through recurring school revenue while continuing to preserve operating resources for instruction, personnel, student services, and other annual obligations.

Although technically accounted for as lease liabilities rather than loans or lines of credit, Empower also has substantive long-term facility obligations that are relevant to understanding the organization's overall debt and facility structure.

The FY2025 financial statements reflect a consolidated lease liability of approximately \$1.75 million. The school entered into facility arrangements through Empower Community Holdings, LLC to provide instructional space for its students. One lease beginning in July 2022 was established for a facility serving students in upper grades, while another beginning in July 2024 was established for the facility serving students in the lower grades.

These commitments were undertaken because Empower's enrollment growth required additional instructional space. They represent part of the school's broader strategy of ensuring that facility capacity grows alongside student demand. Because these are lease obligations rather than traditional loan proceeds, they should be disclosed separately in the exhibits rather than characterized as additional loans.

During the latter portion of the contract term, Empower also pursued financing through Regions to support current facility and capital needs, including the Lower Campus modular classroom expansion. The modular project became necessary because growing enrollment created an immediate need for additional classroom capacity.

Empower initially anticipated that a separate NSFA pre-development loan could assist with project costs and help prevent the school from having to draw significantly from its operating reserves. To keep the modular project moving and ensure that classroom space would be available for students, Empower made an initial payment of approximately \$165,000 from available school funds while awaiting a final determination on the proposed NSFA financing.

Because the anticipated NSFA financing had not been received, Empower subsequently increased the amount of its Regions financing to account for the funding gap and protect the organization from having to absorb the full capital cost through operating reserves. This adjustment demonstrates the organization's use of financing as a capital-management strategy rather than as support for routine operating expenses.

The rationale for increasing the Regions obligation was therefore twofold: to complete the facility expansion necessary to meet student enrollment demand and to preserve sufficient cash and operating reserves for normal school operations.

The available source documents reviewed for this response do not provide the finalized principal amount, interest rate, maturity, or repayment schedule for the Regions obligation. Those figures should therefore be taken directly from the executed Regions loan documents before the final renewal exhibit is submitted rather than estimated in the narrative.

The expected repayment source for the Regions obligation is Empower's recurring operating revenue, particularly state and local revenue associated with student enrollment, together with other unrestricted resources legally available for debt service. The expanded classroom capacity financed through the project also supports the school's ability to maintain and potentially increase enrollment, which in turn supports the recurring revenue base used to meet the obligation.

Empower also explored a proposed NSFA pre-development loan associated with the modular classroom project. However, because the school did not receive a definitive determination or funding under the proposed arrangement before having to move forward with the project, the NSFA financing should not be listed as an obtained loan unless funds were subsequently executed and disbursed.

Instead, the renewal documentation may reference the proposed NSFA financing as context for why Empower increased its Regions financing and used a portion of its available cash to make the initial modular payment.

Empower has been intentional about maintaining debt obligations within the capacity of the organization's recurring revenue structure. The financial statements indicate that, as of September 30, 2025, the school had \$227,693 in notes payable in addition to its lease obligations. The Renewal Performance Report also recognizes that facility loans and other obligations payable beyond the current year may not always be fully visible in interim management-prepared statements and therefore should be considered when evaluating long-term financial sustainability.

Importantly, the Performance Framework's debt-default measure evaluates whether a charter school is current on required debt payments and in compliance with its loan covenants. Empower's financial performance reporting has not identified a debt default during the review period.

The organization also considers debt within the context of its overall financial capacity. Financing decisions are evaluated alongside cash reserves, Days Cash on Hand, annual operating margins, enrollment projections, facility needs, and future recurring expenses. This is especially important as Empower moves into the renewal period and considers additional facility expansion.

Overall, Empower's substantive borrowing during the contract term has been capital- and facility-focused. The obligations have allowed the organization to secure and improve facilities, respond to rapid enrollment growth, and expand classroom capacity while avoiding the need to fund major long-term capital projects entirely from current operating reserves. The organization intends to continue evaluating any future debt conservatively, ensuring that repayment obligations remain supported by predictable revenue streams and do not compromise the resources necessary to deliver the educational program.

(h)Provide a narrative on all substantive recurring school vender contracts and the rationale for outsourcing these functions (\$50,000 or more per year and recurring expenses). This may include CNP, nursing, CTE, financial or other types of ongoing services. A list of all substantive recurring vender contracts is requested in the exhibits section.

During the charter contract term, Empower Schools of Alabama has utilized outside vendors when specialized expertise, operational capacity, or continuity of service could be provided more effectively through an external partner. As the organization has grown and developed greater internal capacity, Empower has also intentionally evaluated whether outsourced functions should remain contracted or be transitioned in-house.

At the present time, Empower has two substantive recurring vendor contracts of \$50,000 or more annually: New Schools for Alabama for back-office/business support and Technology Lab for technology support services. Other functions that have previously involved outside vendors, including Child Nutrition and transportation, have been transitioned to in-house operations and are therefore no longer substantive recurring outsourced services.

Empower contracts with New Schools for Alabama for back-office and financial/business support. The rationale for outsourcing this function has been to provide the organization with access to specialized charter-school financial and operational expertise while Empower continued developing its internal administrative infrastructure.

The services have supported functions associated with financial management, accounting, budgeting, financial reporting, and other business-office responsibilities necessary to operate a public charter school. Particularly during Empower's earlier years of operation and rapid enrollment growth, access to external expertise provided additional capacity to manage increasingly complex fiscal requirements while school leadership remained focused on academic programming, staffing, student services, and organizational development.

The use of an outside back-office provider also provided continuity and technical expertise related to charter-school financial requirements, state reporting, budgeting, and audit preparation. The value of these services has been considered alongside Empower's financial accountability obligations and the need to maintain reliable financial information for school leadership and the governing Board.

As Empower has matured into a larger two-campus organization, however, leadership has increasingly evaluated the long-term efficiency and sustainability of continuing to outsource the full back-office function. Empower's strategic direction is to develop and strengthen internal business-office capacity and ultimately transition appropriate back-office responsibilities in-house. This transition is intended to provide the organization with greater direct control over financial processes, improve responsiveness and accountability, and build sustainable internal institutional knowledge.

Any transition will be implemented carefully to ensure continuity of financial reporting, compliance, payroll, accounts payable and receivable, budgeting, audit support, and other critical business functions. Until sufficient internal capacity is established, New Schools for Alabama continues to provide an important layer of professional and technical support.

Empower also maintains a substantive recurring contract with Technology Lab for technology support. The rationale for outsourcing this function is the specialized nature of K–12 technology infrastructure and the need for consistent technical expertise to support both instructional and administrative operations.

Technology is integral to nearly every component of Empower's educational and operational model. Students and employees rely upon devices, wireless connectivity, instructional software, student-information systems, assessment platforms, communications systems, and other technology resources on a daily basis. Maintaining these systems requires technical knowledge and capacity that extend beyond routine school-level troubleshooting.

Technology Lab provides ongoing support that assists Empower in maintaining reliable technology infrastructure and responding to technical issues that could otherwise interrupt instruction or school operations. Outsourcing this specialized support allows Empower to access professional technology expertise without creating the staffing structure that would be required to maintain the same range of technical services exclusively through full-time internal personnel.

The contract also provides continuity across Empower's two campuses. As the organization has expanded, technology demands have increased through additional classrooms, devices, employ-

ees, security and communications systems, instructional platforms, and administrative technology. Maintaining a dedicated external technology-support relationship allows Empower to respond to those demands while continuing to evaluate the appropriate balance between internal technology leadership and contracted technical support.

Empower monitors the effectiveness and cost of the Technology Lab relationship as part of its regular review of substantive vendor agreements. The organization will continue evaluating whether the scope and cost of contracted services remain appropriate as internal technology capacity evolves.

Empower's current vendor structure also reflects an intentional effort to determine which recurring services are best outsourced and which can be more effectively managed internally. During the contract term, functions such as Child Nutrition and transportation involved significant outside service relationships. Beginning with the 2026–27 school year, Empower transitioned both areas toward direct internal operation.

Bringing these functions in-house provides leadership with greater control over service quality, responsiveness, staffing, scheduling, cost management, and the overall experience provided to students and families. These transitions also demonstrate that Empower does not view outsourcing as a permanent default.

Vendor relationships are evaluated based on the organization's capacity, the quality of service provided, financial efficiency, compliance requirements, and the degree of operational control necessary to support students.

The same philosophy informs Empower's long-term consideration of back-office services. As internal capacity develops, the organization will continue assessing whether functions currently performed externally can be responsibly and efficiently brought in-house.

Substantive recurring vendor contracts are subject to ongoing administrative and governing Board oversight. Empower evaluates vendor relationships based on cost, quality of service, responsiveness, compliance, organizational need, and the extent to which the services directly support the school's mission and operations.

Leadership reviews significant contracts as part of annual budget development and ongoing financial monitoring. The organization also considers whether contracted services remain cost-effective compared with developing internal capacity. When a function is transitioned in-house, the decision is made only after considering the personnel, systems, compliance responsibilities, and financial resources necessary to provide the service effectively.

This approach is particularly important as Empower continues to grow. A service model appropriate for a smaller start-up charter school may no longer represent the most effective structure for a larger two-campus K–8 organization. Empower therefore views its vendor relationships as part of an evolving organizational strategy rather than static contractual arrangements.

Overall, Empower's current substantive recurring vendor structure is limited and intentional. New Schools for Alabama and Technology Lab are the only current recurring vendor relationships meeting the \$50,000 annual threshold. Both contracts provide specialized expertise in functions that remain important to the school's daily operation. At the same time, Empower continues to build internal capacity and evaluate whether outsourcing remains the most effective and financially responsible approach as the organization grows.

(i) Please describe any financial challenges that have occurred since the school's opening and how the challenges have been resolved.

Since opening, Empower Schools of Alabama has experienced several financial challenges associated with launching and rapidly growing a new public charter school. The most significant challenges have involved early-stage cash flow, timing and collection of receivables, enrollment-based revenue growth, management of increasing operational costs, facility obligations, and development of stronger financial reporting and oversight systems. Although these challenges created periods of financial pressure, the school has demonstrated the ability to respond, make operational adjustments, and improve its overall financial position.

One of Empower's most significant financial challenges occurred during the school's early years of operation. As a new charter school, Empower incurred substantial start-up and operating expenses while its enrollment and recurring revenue base were still developing. The Renewal Performance Report notes that Empower spent down its opening cash reserves and ended FY2023 with very limited cash available, while simultaneously carrying more than \$700,000 in receivables.

This created a situation in which revenue had been earned or was expected but had not yet been converted into available cash. As a result, the school's financial statements reflected a weaker near-term liquidity position than would have existed if all outstanding receivables had already been collected.

Empower addressed this challenge through a combination of increased enrollment, improved receivables management, stronger cash monitoring, and more deliberate expenditure management. The Renewal Performance Report notes that enrollment increased from 131 students in FY2023 to 255 students in FY2024, which helped the school recover financially and end FY2024 in a positive cash position.

A related challenge was the significant growth in accounts receivable during the early years. By the end of FY2024, Empower's receivables had increased to more than \$1.5 million, limiting the amount of cash immediately available for operations even though the revenue was recognized as due to the school.

Empower subsequently placed greater emphasis on monitoring and collecting outstanding receivables. By the end of FY2025, the school had reduced receivables to just over \$200,000, which materially strengthened its cash position and contributed to the school moving into a "Meets" financial expectation status.

The FY2025 financial statements similarly show accounts receivable of approximately \$230,286 and cash and cash equivalents of approximately \$1.72 million, demonstrating the substantial improvement in converting revenue into available cash.

Empower also experienced an operating deficit during FY2023. The Renewal Performance Report shows a negative Total Margin of 3.7% for FY2023, indicating that expenditures exceeded revenues during that fiscal year.

Operating at a deficit was not sustainable as a long-term strategy, particularly for a growing charter school that needed to build reserves and maintain sufficient liquidity. Empower responded by more closely aligning expenditures with enrollment-generated revenues, expanding enrollment, managing outstanding receivables, and strengthening budget oversight.

The financial turnaround is reflected in subsequent results. The Total Margin improved to 18.1% in FY2024 and remained positive at 1.5% in FY2025. The aggregated three-year margin was 14.5% in FY2024 and 7.1% in FY2025, both above the Commission's 2% sustainability threshold used in the Renewal Performance Report. As a result, the Sustainability Indicator moved from "Does Not Meet" in FY2023 to "Meets" in FY2024 and FY2025.

Another ongoing financial-management challenge involves the timing of revenue receipts. Charter school revenues and expenditures do not occur evenly throughout the fiscal year. The Renewal Performance Report specifically recognizes that supplementary state allocations received near the end of the fiscal year may cause financial indicators to fluctuate significantly depending upon the date on which they are calculated.

This issue has required Empower to become increasingly attentive to monthly cash-flow forecasting rather than relying solely on a single interim cash-on-hand calculation. Leadership now considers anticipated state allocations, receivables, payroll, major vendor payments, debt obligations, and other expenditures when evaluating the school's short-term liquidity.

This approach has helped Empower better distinguish between a temporary cash-flow fluctuation caused by revenue timing and a structural financial problem requiring corrective action.

Empower's rapid enrollment growth has been financially beneficial because it has expanded the school's recurring revenue base, but that growth has also generated significant new expenses. Increasing enrollment requires additional teachers and support staff, instructional materials, technology, transportation capacity, food service, special education services, student supports, and facilities.

The organization has therefore had to manage the tension between growing quickly enough to respond to family demand while ensuring that expenditures do not outpace sustainable revenue growth.

This has resulted in a more deliberate approach to future enrollment. During the renewal period, enrollment growth will be linked to available facility space, staffing capacity, student demand, and the organization's ability to maintain instructional and operational quality rather than simply maximizing enrollment.

Facilities have represented another significant financial challenge. Empower's growth required the school to obtain and improve educational facilities and eventually operate a two-campus model. These needs resulted in long-term facility obligations, including financing and leases.

As of September 30, 2025, the school's long-term note payable balance was \$227,693, and the financial statements state that the debt was associated with the purchase and improvement of school facilities. Empower also carried significant lease obligations associated with facilities used to serve its students. The FY2025 statements report a lease liability of approximately \$1.75 million. These obligations have required Empower to evaluate facility decisions carefully within the context of enrollment revenue, cash reserves, debt service, and long-term sustainability. Rather than attempting to fund major capital needs entirely from unrestricted operating cash, the organization has utilized financing and lease arrangements to spread certain costs over multiple years.

Moving forward, facility growth will remain directly connected to the school's ability to responsibly finance additional capacity. Empower's objective is to ensure that facility expansion responds to enrollment demand without compromising the resources required for instruction and student services.

Empower has also experienced challenges associated with developing the financial-management infrastructure required of a growing charter school. During the earlier years of the contract term, the Renewal Performance Report identified inconsistencies in the frequency of Board financial review. Board minutes reflected review of only 3 of 12 monthly financial reports in FY2023, compared with 9 of 12 in FY2024, 8 of 12 in FY2025, and 5 of the first 6 available reports in FY2026.

This represents an area where Empower has intentionally strengthened its systems. Financial reporting has become a more routine component of governing Board oversight, with leadership

providing monthly financial information and the Board increasingly reviewing budgets, actual financial performance, cash position, expenditures, contracts, and other significant financial matters.

Empower has also strengthened its internal business-office processes and is working toward building greater internal financial-management capacity. The organization's long-term objective is to have financial systems that are not only compliant but also timely, transparent, responsive, and useful for decision-making.

It is important to distinguish the financial challenges described above from financial-management or audit failures. Despite periods of liquidity pressure and the need to strengthen administrative systems, Empower's FY2023, FY2024, and FY2025 independent audits were unmodified and contained no findings.

This provides important context. The challenges encountered during the charter term primarily involved cash-flow timing, rapid organizational growth, receivables, operating margins, facilities, and the maturation of financial systems, rather than audit findings involving misuse of funds or material deficiencies in the school's financial statements.

Empower's financial experience since opening demonstrates the challenges associated with moving from a start-up charter school to a larger K–8 organization. The early years required the school to operate while enrollment and revenue were still developing, resulting in cash-flow pressure, a FY2023 operating deficit, and substantial outstanding receivables.

By FY2025, however, Empower had substantially improved its financial position. Receivables had been reduced to approximately \$230,000, cash and cash equivalents had increased to approximately \$1.72 million, and total governmental fund balances were approximately \$1.67 million.

The organization has learned from these early financial challenges and has strengthened its emphasis on cash-flow forecasting, receivables management, conservative budgeting, enrollment-based financial planning, Board financial oversight, monitoring of debt and facility obligations, and preservation of adequate operating reserves.

Ultimately, the resolution of Empower's early financial challenges is demonstrated not by the absence of financial pressures, but by the organization's ability to identify those pressures and improve its financial position over time. The school moved from an early period of limited liquidity and negative operating performance to a position in which its most recent Renewal Performance Report ratings for Near-Term Financial Health and Financial Sustainability are "Meets." This improvement provides a stronger financial foundation for the renewal period while reinforcing the importance of continued disciplined financial management as the school responds to enrollment demand and future facility needs.

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

4. Organizational Performance

Status: Completed

Form Result

Organizational Performance

This section provides an opportunity to describe the organizational performance of the school. Schools should reference the evidence contained in the organizational section of the school's Renewal Performance Report and give context on the metrics contained therein. Schools may

also submit evidence that is not contained in the Renewal Performance Report that enhances or explains the organizational performance of the school. Submissions may include evidence of current compliance in areas for which the school was found previously to be non-compliant or other updates relevant to the Renewal Performance Report. Please reference the specific Performance Framework measures to which the information applies, as appropriate.

(a) Provide a narrative on governing a school which prioritizes the interests of the public. Address the challenges encountered over the review period by the governing board with oversight and accountability on behalf of the school community. Include a discussion of how the board holds school leadership accountable, and discuss the evaluation process the board uses to assess school leadership. Attach leadership evaluation templates, metrics, surveys or other evidence to support the leadership evaluation process as described. Do not attach evaluation of individual school leaders. Refer to the Renewal Performance Report in your discussion.

Empower Schools of Alabama recognizes that its governing Board holds the charter on behalf of the public and therefore has a responsibility to govern in a manner that prioritizes students, families, transparency, legal compliance, responsible stewardship of public resources, organizational accountability, and the long-term sustainability of the school. The Board's role is to govern and provide oversight rather than manage the day-to-day operations of the school. Through policy adoption, strategic oversight, financial monitoring, leadership accountability, and public meetings, the Board works to ensure that Empower remains focused on fulfilling its mission and meeting its obligations as a public charter school.

This responsibility is consistent with the Commission's Performance Framework, which describes the charter relationship as an exchange of autonomy for accountability. Charter governing boards are entrusted with public funds and the education of public-school students and, in return, are expected to achieve agreed-upon results, manage resources responsibly, comply with applicable requirements, and provide students with a quality educational program.

The Renewal Performance Report provides evidence that Empower's Board has generally fulfilled its responsibility to govern in the public interest while also identifying specific areas in which governance practices required improvement. Most significantly, Empower received an overall rating of "Meets" for Governing in the Public Interest in each year of the review period—SY2022–23, SY2023–24, SY2024–25, and SY2025–26.

The report also identifies several areas of consistent strength. Empower received "Meets" ratings in all four years for Mission & Vision, Board Governing Documents, Enrollment & Recruitment, and Disclosures. Additionally, Virtual Compliance Monitoring found Board policy documents publicly available, and Commission review of Empower's bylaws in SY2024–25 and SY2025–26 resulted in no findings.

These findings demonstrate that the Board maintained important foundational governance structures while overseeing an organization experiencing significant enrollment, programmatic, operational, and facility growth.

An important supplemental indicator of Empower's commitment to organizational quality and continuous improvement occurred during the 2024–2025 school year, when Empower's Upper Campus earned Cognia Accreditation. This achievement represents an important milestone in the development of the Upper Campus and provides external validation of the school's commitment to establishing the organizational and educational systems necessary to support students.

Cognia describes accreditation as an evidence-based quality-assurance process designed to evaluate an institution's overall ability to provide high-quality education and demonstrate a commitment to ongoing improvement. Cognia Accreditation requires institutions to demonstrate alignment with established expectations and undergo an external review process.

The Upper Campus's achievement of Cognia Accreditation is particularly meaningful when considered alongside the academic challenges documented in the Renewal Performance Report. The report acknowledges that Empower has struggled with student achievement, particularly in mathematics, while also recognizing significant academic growth during portions of the contract term. For SY2024–25, Empower received an “Exceeds” rating for Academic Growth, with ELA growth of 8.9%, mathematics growth of 52.1%, and science growth of 112.5%.

Cognia Accreditation does not replace or diminish the importance of the academic performance measures established by the Alabama Public Charter School Commission. Rather, it provides supplemental evidence of the school's commitment to building the systems, leadership practices, learning environment, and continuous-improvement structures necessary to improve long-term student outcomes. Cognia identifies accreditation as an independent mark of quality and a framework intended to strengthen readiness and foster continuous improvement.

Earning accreditation during the 2024–2025 school year also demonstrates that, while Empower was addressing academic achievement shortfalls identified in the Performance Framework, the organization continued investing in institutional quality and external accountability. This accomplishment reflects the work of school leadership, faculty and staff, students, families, the governing Board, and other stakeholders who contributed to the accreditation process.

The Board views accreditation not as an endpoint, but as another accountability structure supporting Empower's ongoing improvement. Maintaining accreditation requires continued attention to educational quality, organizational effectiveness, evidence-based decision-making, and continuous improvement. This expectation complements the Board's responsibility under the charter Performance Framework to monitor academic, financial, and organizational outcomes.

The Board also experienced challenges during the review period. Empower acknowledges these findings and views them as opportunities to strengthen its governance systems and improve the documentation of Board oversight.

Board participation and composition represented one area requiring continued attention. Board member attendance fluctuated from 68% in SY2022–23 to 56% in SY2023–24, 76% in SY2024–25, and 82% in SY2025–26. The Renewal Performance Report also notes that the Board met only twice in 2023, with two additional meetings failing to achieve quorum.

The improvement to 82% Board attendance in SY2025–26 demonstrates progress; however, the experience reinforced the importance of maintaining consistent Board participation and ensuring that the Board is able to achieve quorum and conduct the public business of the school.

The Renewal Performance Report also indicated that changes in Board membership were not always reflected through formal votes in the Board meeting minutes. Empower acknowledges the importance of maintaining a clear public record of appointments and resignations.

Since that period, Empower has strengthened its documentation practices. Board meeting minutes provided as supplemental evidence will demonstrate that the newest Board member appointments and Board member resignations were formally presented, voted upon, and recorded during Board meetings. Going forward, Empower will continue ensuring that appointments, resignations, officer changes, and other actions affecting Board composition are clearly reflected in the official minutes.

The Renewal Performance Report also identified Open Meetings Act compliance as an area requiring improvement. The measure was rated “Meets” during the first two years of the review period, “Does Not Meet” in SY2024–25, and “Approaches” in SY2025–26. The report specifically identifies concerns involving documentation of an executive session and instances in which meetings did not have the required level of in-person Board participation.

Empower acknowledges these findings. Current school leadership works diligently with the Board to ensure that Empower adheres to the requirements of the Alabama Open Meetings Act. Particular attention is now given to meeting notices, the availability of an appropriate in-person meeting option, quorum requirements, procedures for entering executive session, accurate recording of votes and Board actions, and the maintenance of minutes that clearly document the Board's public business.

This work is not viewed simply as a compliance exercise. Empower recognizes that public access and transparency are fundamental to the governance of a public charter school. The community should be able to understand when the Board meets, what matters are considered, and what formal actions are taken. Current leadership therefore works closely with the Board to strengthen meeting procedures and documentation and to reduce the likelihood that the concerns identified in the Renewal Performance Report will recur.

The Board's responsibility to govern in the public interest also includes careful stewardship of public funds. Financial oversight presented challenges during portions of the review period. The Renewal Performance Report notes that in CY2023 the Board achieved quorum only twice and approved only three of twelve monthly financial reports for FY2023. The frequency of financial review subsequently improved, with nine of twelve reports approved for FY2024, eight of twelve for FY2025, and five of the first six available reports for FY2026.

Financial outcomes also demonstrate improvement in organizational sustainability. The Renewal Performance Report states that Empower recovered from a negative total margin in FY2023 and ended FY2024 and FY2025 with three-year aggregated margins above the Commission's 2% target. Additionally, financial audits for FY2023, FY2024, and FY2025 were unmodified and contained no findings.

These results demonstrate the importance of consistent Board financial oversight and reinforce the Board's responsibility to monitor budgets, financial statements, audits, cash position, major expenditures, and the long-term financial sustainability of the organization.

One of the most important responsibilities of the governing Board is the selection, support, evaluation, and accountability of the Executive Director. The Renewal Performance Report identified Leadership Accountability as an area requiring improvement and stated that there was no evidence of leadership evaluation in the Board meeting minutes reviewed for the report.

Empower has taken concrete action to address this finding by establishing a formal Executive Director Annual Performance Evaluation aligned with the 2025–2030 Strategic Plan.

The evaluation tool explicitly operationalizes the Board's responsibility to evaluate and support the Executive Director against the organization's strategic outcomes. Evaluators are directed to use the Quarterly Strategic Priority Dashboard, Annual State of the School Report, direct observation, and other specific evidence when completing the evaluation.

Most importantly, the process is now being implemented and formally documented. Dr. Meredith Davis was evaluated by the Board using the established Executive Director evaluation process. Her evaluation was subsequently presented to and approved by the Board during the August Board Meeting, and the official Board meeting minutes document this action. Those minutes will be provided as supporting evidence of the Board's implementation of its leadership-accountability responsibilities.

This represents a significant improvement from the concern identified in the Renewal Performance Report. The issue was not simply the need to develop an evaluation instrument; the Board needed

a systematic process through which leadership performance could be assessed, discussed, acted upon, and reflected in the official Board record. The current process provides that structure.

Empower's Executive Director evaluation framework is designed to evaluate both organizational results and leadership effectiveness.

The first component, Section A – Strategic Priority and KPI Performance, evaluates progress against measurable targets established through Empower's strategic plan. The measures span the organization's three strategic pillars: The Instructional Core, Community & Equity, and Organizational Sustainability.

The KPI structure includes measurable outcomes such as academic performance, third-grade reading, professional development participation, student belonging, family participation, staff retention and satisfaction, enrollment and facility capacity, cash reserves, operating margin, and audit status.

The second component, Section B – Leadership Competencies, evaluates the leadership practices necessary to achieve those organizational outcomes. The domains include Vision & Strategic Leadership; Instructional & Academic Leadership; People, Culture & Talent Leadership; Financial & Operational Stewardship; Board Partnership & Governance; Community, Equity & External Relations; and Communication & Transparency.

The evaluation utilizes a four-point performance scale ranging from 4 – Exceeds Expectations to 1 – Does Not Meet Expectations. Performance rated as “Approaching Expectations” indicates that progress is evident but falls short of the established target and may warrant corrective action, while “Does Not Meet Expectations” indicates that performance is significantly below target and requires intervention.

The evaluation process concludes by identifying key strengths, priority areas for growth, and goals and priorities for the coming year. These priorities are intended to inform the next Annual Strategic Priorities Map and 90-Day Action Plans, creating a direct connection between the annual evaluation and the organization's subsequent improvement efforts.

In this way, the evaluation is not intended to function merely as an annual compliance activity. It is designed to provide the Board with a structured mechanism for establishing expectations, evaluating performance against measurable outcomes, providing feedback, identifying needed improvement, and holding the Executive Director accountable for organizational results.

Leadership accountability does not occur only during the annual evaluation. Empower has developed additional structures intended to allow the Board to monitor organizational performance throughout the year.

The 2025–2030 Strategic Plan identifies governance and accountability tools including an Annual Strategic Plan Priorities Map, 90-Day Planning Template, Quarterly KPI Dashboard, Root Cause Analysis and Intervention Protocol, Board Strategy Oversight Guide, Board Dashboard Guide, Executive Director Evaluation Rubric, and Board Calendar and Agenda Playbook.

Together, these structures are intended to provide the Board with regular information regarding academic achievement, school culture, enrollment, finances, facilities, community engagement, staffing, and organizational sustainability. When performance is below an established target, the Board can ask questions, require additional information, monitor corrective strategies, and evaluate subsequent progress.

This structure strengthens the distinction between governance and management. School leadership is responsible for operating the organization and implementing strategies, while the Board

establishes expectations, monitors results, evaluates leadership performance, and intervenes at the governance level when organizational outcomes are not meeting expectations.

Ultimately, governing in the public interest requires the Board to consider how its decisions affect students, families, employees, taxpayers, and the broader community. The Board's responsibility is not simply to preserve the organization; it is to ensure that Empower fulfills the public purpose for which its charter was granted.

Throughout the contract term, the Board has maintained oversight of Empower's mission and vision, enrollment growth, academic program, finances, facilities, policies, contracts, and organizational leadership. The Renewal Performance Report's overall "Meets" rating for Governing in the Public Interest across all four years provides evidence that the Board maintained the fundamental governance structures necessary to carry out this responsibility.

At the same time, Empower recognizes that effective public governance requires a willingness to acknowledge weaknesses and improve. The Renewal Performance Report identified concerns related to Board attendance and quorum, Open Meetings Act practices, financial-report review, documentation of Board membership actions, and leadership evaluation. Those findings have helped the Board and current leadership identify areas where governance systems must become more formal, consistent, transparent, and evidence-based.

The organization has responded by strengthening meeting procedures and Open Meetings Act compliance, improving documentation of Board appointments and resignations, formalizing the Executive Director evaluation process, documenting Board action on the Executive Director's evaluation, and developing a strategic performance-management structure that provides the Board with measurable indicators of organizational performance.

These improvements demonstrate that Empower's approach to governance is grounded in continuous improvement and public accountability. The goal is to preserve the autonomy provided to a public charter school while ensuring that autonomy is exercised with the transparency, fiduciary responsibility, legal compliance, oversight, and accountability expected of an organization entrusted with public students and public resources.

(b)Provide a narrative on creating a great place for employees to work and students to learn. Include a discussion on how employees are evaluated, supported, and their legal protections. Address staff turnover and efforts to recruit and keep high quality employees. As an attachment, provide retention rates for staff over the contract term. Include in the attachment a summary of whether staff left voluntarily or were asked not to return for each school year. Address student onboarding, students' rights once enrolled, and non-academic support in place for students. Refer to the Renewal Performance Report in your discussion. Provide supplementary documentation as needed.

Empower Schools of Alabama recognizes that a high-quality learning environment for students depends significantly on the quality, stability, development, and well-being of the adults serving them each day. Creating a great place to work and learn therefore requires an intentional approach to employee evaluation and support, professional development, legal protections, compensation, recruitment and retention, school culture, student onboarding, student rights, and academic and non-academic supports.

The Renewal Performance Report provides strong evidence of Empower's performance in this area. Under Creating Great Places to Work, Empower received an overall rating of "Meets" in every year of the review period—SY2022–23, SY2023–24, SY2024–25, and SY2025–26. The school also received "Meets" in every year for the individual measures of Employee Rights, Background Checks, Equitable Compensation, Professional Development, and Staff Training.

Similarly, Empower received an overall "Meets" rating for Supporting Students & Protecting Students' Rights in each year of the contract period. These results demonstrate that Empower has established

important organizational systems for both employees and students while continuing to refine those systems as the organization has grown.

During the current period of organizational development, Empower has strengthened its employee-evaluation system to ensure that staff members receive clearer expectations, more consistent feedback, and meaningful opportunities for professional growth. The goal of evaluation is not simply to assign an annual rating. Empower intends evaluation to serve as both an accountability mechanism and a professional-development tool, allowing effective employees to be recognized and retained while providing employees who need improvement with clear feedback, coaching, and support.

Beginning with the 2026–27 school year, classroom teachers are evaluated through the Empower Educator Excellence Framework (EEEF). The framework was developed around the principle that clear expectations, frequent and specific feedback, multiple sources of evidence, and meaningful recognition support professional growth and stronger student outcomes. The framework specifically states that it is designed to provide regular, actionable feedback rather than a single annual judgment and to recognize and retain effective educators while supporting those who are still developing.

The teacher evaluation system uses multiple measures rather than relying on a single observation or test score. Classroom Practice represents 50% of the evaluation, Student Achievement and Growth 25%, Commitment to School Community 15%, and Family and Student Feedback 10%, with Core Professionalism considered separately.

Classroom practice is evaluated through announced and unannounced observations conducted by the principal, assistant principal, or instructional coach. The framework establishes performance expectations in areas including welcoming and inclusive classroom environments, student engagement, rigorous standards-aligned instruction, purposeful lesson design, student ownership of learning, checks for understanding, and differentiated supports.

The evaluation model also intentionally connects educator performance to student learning. Student Achievement and Growth considers fall-to-spring benchmark growth and teacher-designed assessments tied to the teacher's content area. In addition, teachers are evaluated on collaboration, contribution to school culture, family partnerships, and their willingness to seek and act upon professional feedback.

The observation cycle is differentiated based on educator experience and prior performance. First-year teachers receive four observations annually, teachers in years two and three receive three, established teachers with prior Effective ratings receive two, and educators with two consecutive Highly Effective ratings may receive one observation with the option to request an additional observation. Feedback conversations are expected within ten school days of classroom observations.

This differentiated approach is intended to direct the greatest amount of coaching and observation support toward employees who need it most while recognizing the demonstrated effectiveness of experienced educators.

Empower has also established a formal evaluation process for support personnel through the Empower Support Excellence Framework (ESEF). This represents an important organizational improvement because employees outside the classroom also have significant influence on the quality of the school environment.

The ESEF covers teacher assistants, counselors, social workers, custodial staff, office assistants, and cafeteria staff. Rather than applying one generic evaluation rubric to fundamentally different positions, the system establishes standards aligned with the actual responsibilities of each role. The framework is designed to provide regular actionable feedback through twice-yearly assessment

cycles, establish consistent expectations, and apply a transparent rating structure across the organization.

Support employees are evaluated primarily against role-specific standards, while all employees are also evaluated on their commitment to the broader school community and Core Professionalism. For example, the evaluation standards for counselors assess data-driven programming, individualized student planning, guidance curriculum, responsive counseling, confidentiality, family engagement, collaboration, and student transition support.

Likewise, the social-worker framework evaluates prevention and intervention services, coordination with families and external providers, mental-health and behavioral supports, documentation, progress monitoring, assessment reporting, and family engagement.

All covered support roles are formally assessed twice during the school year, with a required feedback conference following each cycle. This ensures that support employees, like teachers, receive structured feedback and are not evaluated solely through an end-of-year judgment.

Together, the teacher, support-staff, and school-leader evaluation systems establish a more comprehensive performance-management structure across Empower.

Empower recognizes that employees cannot reasonably be held accountable for high performance without receiving the professional support necessary to achieve those expectations.

The Renewal Performance Report rated Empower “Meets” for Professional Development and Staff Training in every year reviewed. It notes Board consideration of an early-release Friday schedule to support teacher needs and identifies professional-development partnerships used to strengthen the educational program. The report also confirms that mandated staff training has routinely been completed and documented.

Supplemental documentation further demonstrates a structured professional-learning program that includes weekly professional development, PLCs, instructional coaching, MTSS meetings, student-data analysis, lesson planning, SEL data review, personalized-learning training, and assessment preparation.

The evaluation and professional-development systems are intentionally connected. When observations or evaluation results identify an area for growth, coaching, professional learning, goal setting, and progress monitoring can be used to support improvement. Conversely, high-performing educators can be recognized and provided opportunities for greater responsibility and leadership.

Creating a positive workplace also requires employees to understand that their legal and professional rights are protected.

The Renewal Performance Report confirms that Empower received “Meets” for Employee Rights in every year of the review period. The Employee Handbook includes provisions addressing leave, harassment, complaint procedures, equal employment opportunity, and nondiscrimination.

The school also received “Meets” throughout the review period for Background Checks and Equitable Compensation. The report confirms Empower's compliance with required background checks and notes that regular personnel are paid according to salary or hourly wage schedules adopted by the organization.

The evaluation frameworks add another layer of transparency by establishing written performance expectations, defined rating scales, feedback processes, and common evaluation criteria. This helps employees understand how performance will be assessed and provides a more consistent basis for professional-development, recognition, and employment decisions.

Empower recognizes that staff retention has been a challenge during the charter term. As a growing charter school, the organization competes for qualified educators in a regional labor market that includes traditional school systems and other educational employers. In addition to normal workforce factors, Empower has identified two structural issues that can affect its ability to retain effective teachers: the length of the school day and the need for a clearer, more supportive employee evaluation system.

Historically, Empower's extended school day has been an important component of its educational model because it provides additional instructional and intervention time for students. However, the organization has also heard and observed that a longer workday can make Empower less competitive when educators compare positions with neighboring school systems. Even highly committed teachers must consider workload, family responsibilities, commute time, compensation, and work-life balance when deciding whether to remain at a school.

Empower therefore recognizes that maintaining a school day that is significantly longer than comparable schools may unintentionally create a retention barrier. The organization does not intend to abandon the additional academic supports that students need; rather, it seeks to better balance instructional needs with the need to recruit and retain excellent educators.

This concern is being addressed through the charter renewal process. Empower's proposed schedule revisions are intended to create a more competitive and sustainable employee work environment while preserving a strong academic program. The proposed schedule maintains a consistent Monday–Thursday instructional structure while utilizing early-release Fridays, allowing the organization to protect instructional time and create dedicated opportunities for professional learning, planning, collaboration, and data analysis.

The second issue has been the need for a more clearly defined evaluation system. Employees are more likely to remain in an organization when expectations are transparent, feedback is meaningful, high performance is recognized, and evaluation is perceived as a process for growth rather than simply a mechanism for discipline. The newly developed EEEF and ESEF directly address this concern by establishing role-specific expectations, recurring feedback cycles, multiple measures of performance, and clearly defined rating systems.

For teachers, the final evaluation explicitly distinguishes Highly Effective, Effective, Developing, Minimally Effective, and Ineffective performance. Highly Effective educators are eligible for recognition and retention incentives, while employees requiring improvement receive focused or intensive support before more consequential employment decisions are considered.

This structure is intended to make Empower a stronger professional environment by ensuring that effective educators understand that their contributions are valued while employees who need additional support receive clear expectations and opportunities to improve.

Empower's current strategic framework establishes 75% teacher retention as the SY2026 target, increasing to 83% by SY2028 and 85% by 2030, with a long-term goal of 90% retention among high-performing educators. Current evaluation documentation reports that Empower achieved a 75% overall teacher-retention rate, meeting the annual target.

However, Empower's goal is not merely to improve the overall percentage. The organization seeks specifically to recruit, develop, and retain high-quality, mission-aligned employees.

Strategies include stronger instructional coaching, professional development, competitive compensation within available resources, clearer performance expectations, improved feedback systems, recognition for high performance, leadership-development opportunities, collaborative planning structures, improvements to staff culture, and proposed changes to the school schedule.

Empower's strategic plan also calls for developing partnerships with universities and teacher-residency programs, strengthening internal leadership pipelines, creating career pathways, and considering compensation structures that recognize strong teaching, student growth, and leadership contributions.

The goal of the renewal period is therefore to address both professional and structural factors affecting retention. The evaluation system addresses clarity, support, growth, and recognition; the proposed school-day changes address workload and competitiveness. Together, these initiatives are intended to make Empower a more sustainable workplace for effective educators.

Employee feedback provides another important measure of workplace quality. The March 2026 Staff Culture and Climate Survey showed an overall 86% favorable rating, with 100% participation among 42 employees. The Teachers dimension reached 93% favorable, while Environment reached 84% favorable.

The 86% staff-satisfaction result also exceeded Empower's strategic-plan target of 70%. These results indicate substantial strengths in staff culture while not eliminating the need to address retention challenges associated with workload, schedule, compensation, or individual employment circumstances.

Empower will continue using staff survey information, retention data, exit information, and employee feedback to identify opportunities for improvement.

Creating a great place for students to learn begins with an effective onboarding process. Empower seeks to ensure that students and families understand the school's academic expectations, attendance requirements, culture, behavioral expectations, transportation processes, communication systems, and available supports before and during their transition into the school.

The Renewal Performance Report rated Empower "Meets" for Recruitment & Onboarding in all four years. It specifically notes that the Family & Student Handbook provides important enrollment dates and explains student enrollment and random-lottery procedures, while enrollment information is made available to families through the school's website.

Family and student orientation and ongoing school communication supplement these formal processes by helping families become familiar with the expectations and resources of the school community.

Once students enroll at Empower, they retain the rights and protections afforded to public-school students. Admission and continued enrollment are not conditioned upon academic performance, disability status, behavior, or other characteristics prohibited by law.

The Renewal Performance Report confirms that Empower received an overall "Meets" rating for Supporting Students & Protecting Students' Rights in all four years.

The Family & Student Handbook establishes behavioral expectations and discipline procedures, and the Renewal Performance Report notes that Empower uses positive behavior supports and a school-wide behavior-point system with identified interventions.

Empower also maintains a grievance process, and the Renewal Performance Report rated the school's Grievance Policy "Meets" throughout the review period.

The Renewal Performance Report identifies Student Records as an area rated "Approaches," noting that monitoring did not identify a website link providing access to student records information, although Empower utilizes PowerSchool to maintain student records. Since reviewing the findings in the Renewal Performance Report, Empower has addressed this area by updating its website

to provide families with appropriate access to student records information and related resources. This corrective action reflects Empower's commitment to continuous improvement and to promptly addressing identified opportunities to strengthen transparency, accessibility, and compliance.

Empower recognizes that students' ability to learn is influenced by their social-emotional well-being, behavioral needs, mental health, attendance, family circumstances, sense of belonging, and opportunities to develop interests and relationships beyond the classroom. For this reason, Empower maintains a comprehensive system of non-academic supports designed to help students feel connected to school, remain engaged, develop socially and emotionally, and be ready to learn.

The Renewal Performance Report rated Empower "Meets" for Counseling & Guidance during every year of the review period and confirms that counseling and guidance services are available to students.

Empower's non-academic supports include SEL programming, MTSS, counseling, social work, mental-health services, positive behavior interventions, attendance intervention, family engagement, student-support processes, athletics, extracurricular activities, and the school-wide House System.

The House System is an important component of Empower's efforts to strengthen student culture and belonging. Through the House System, students become part of smaller communities within the larger school environment, providing additional opportunities to build relationships with peers and adults, participate in positive competition, engage in service and leadership activities, receive recognition, and develop school pride. The House System is intended to create meaningful connections across grade levels and give every student another place within the school community where they can belong and contribute.

Empower also recognizes that some students require therapeutic services beyond those that can be provided directly by school personnel. When appropriate, students are referred to outside mental-health and therapy providers that partner with Empower to provide services on-site at the school whenever possible. Bringing these services into the school setting helps minimize the amount of instructional time students miss to attend outside appointments and reduces the transportation and scheduling burden placed on parents and guardians. With appropriate parental consent and confidentiality protections, this model also supports greater coordination among families, school personnel, and outside providers.

Empower views athletics, extracurricular activities, clubs, and enrichment opportunities as important components of student engagement and development. These activities provide students with additional ways to build relationships, develop leadership and teamwork skills, discover new interests, strengthen their connection to school, and experience success outside of the traditional academic classroom.

Students have opportunities to participate in athletic programs including volleyball, basketball, and track. Athletics provide structured opportunities for students to develop teamwork, perseverance, discipline, responsibility, physical fitness, and school pride while representing Empower in competitive environments.

Beginning in the 2026–27 school year, students will also have an opportunity to participate in band, further expanding the school's arts and enrichment offerings.

Empower also provides clubs and enrichment opportunities that are intentionally driven by student interests. Offerings may evolve as student interests and available resources change, allowing the school to create opportunities that are responsive to the students currently being served. Current and planned opportunities include Robotics, Golf, Anime, Pickleball, Video Gaming, Girls Inc. STEM, Chess, Pep Squad, Dance, Line Dancing, Board Games, Art, and Choir.

This student-interest-driven approach is intentional. Empower recognizes that not every student will find their strongest connection to school through athletics or academics alone. A student who is interested in robotics, art, gaming, chess, music, dance, or another activity should have opportunities to explore those interests, connect with peers who share them, and develop positive relationships with adults outside of the traditional classroom setting.

These opportunities also support Empower's broader efforts to increase student belonging, engagement, recurrent enrollment, and connection to the school community. Athletics, band, clubs, the House System, and other enrichment activities provide students with reasons to become invested in their school experience and help create a more complete K–8 educational program.

Empower's Support Staff Evaluation Framework further reinforces the importance of the school's non-academic services. Counselors are evaluated on areas such as responsive counseling, individualized student planning, family engagement, confidentiality, and collaboration with outside agencies. Social workers are similarly evaluated on prevention and intervention, crisis support, service coordination, mental-health and behavioral services, documentation, progress monitoring, and engagement of students and families.

Together, counseling, social work, SEL, MTSS, mental-health partnerships, on-site therapeutic services, the House System, athletics, band, clubs, enrichment opportunities, positive behavior supports, attendance intervention, and family-support structures reflect Empower's commitment to supporting the whole child. These services and opportunities are intended not only to respond when students experience challenges, but also to proactively create the relationships, belonging, interests, leadership opportunities, support systems, and sense of community that help students remain engaged in school and positioned for academic and personal success.

Taken together, the evidence demonstrates that Empower has established a strong foundation for creating a positive environment for employees and students. The Renewal Performance Report's consistent "Meets" ratings for Creating Great Places to Work and Supporting Students & Protecting Students' Rights across the contract term provide important evidence of this performance.

At the same time, Empower recognizes that creating a great place to work requires more than compliance. The organization must continually examine why effective employees remain, why others leave, and what structural changes are necessary to remain competitive for high-quality educators.

For Empower, two important areas of focus entering the renewal term are the implementation of stronger, more transparent evaluation systems and adjustment of the school schedule to address the impact of the extended school day on employee recruitment and retention. The new evaluation frameworks are designed to provide clear expectations, recurring feedback, professional support, recognition, and meaningful accountability. Proposed schedule changes in the renewal application are intended to create a more sustainable work environment while protecting instructional quality and dedicated professional-development time.

Empower's goal for the renewal term is therefore to create an environment in which high expectations and high support coexist. Employees should know what is expected, receive the tools and feedback necessary to succeed, be recognized for strong performance, have their legal rights protected, and experience working conditions that make remaining at Empower professionally and personally sustainable. Students, in turn, should learn in an environment characterized by effective educators, stability, rigorous instruction, positive relationships, legal protections, and comprehensive academic and non-academic support.

(c)Provide a narrative on the educational program requirements necessary to operate a public school in Alabama. Address the challenges faced over the contract term in meeting these

obligations. This includes requirements for special populations. Reference evidence from the Renewal Performance Report. Provide supplementary documentation as needed.

Empower Schools of Alabama recognizes that operating a public charter school in Alabama provides flexibility in certain areas of school design and operation, but it does not eliminate the school's responsibility to comply with applicable state and federal educational requirements. Throughout the charter contract term, Empower has been responsible for maintaining an educational program that complies with requirements related to the school calendar and instructional schedule, promotion, Alabama Courses of Study, state assessments, staff qualifications, instructional materials and supports, mandated programming, special education, English Learner services, parent engagement, and equitable access for students with disabilities and other special populations.

The Renewal Performance Report provides evidence that Empower has generally met these obligations. Most significantly, the school received an overall rating of "Meets" for Delivering the Educational Program in each year of the review period—SY2022–23, SY2023–24, SY2024–25, and SY2025–26. Empower also received an overall "Meets" rating for Providing for Special Populations in each of those four years.

At the same time, the Renewal Performance Report identifies several areas where documentation or implementation required improvement. Empower has used these findings to strengthen its systems and better position the organization for continued compliance during the renewal term.

Empower is responsible for maintaining a school calendar and instructional schedule that meet Alabama requirements. The Renewal Performance Report rated the school "Meets" for School Calendar & Schedule in all four years and confirms that Empower provided a calendar meeting state requirements through the Commission's monitoring platform, made the calendar available on the school website, and documented Board approval of the calendar.

Empower also received "Meets" for Graduation & Promotion throughout the contract term. The Family & Student Handbook contains the school's grading and promotion policy and establishes requirements for students to advance to the next grade.

The school will continue to ensure that proposed changes to its instructional schedule during the renewal period maintain required instructional time. This is particularly important as Empower seeks to balance the instructional needs of students with a school schedule that is sustainable for families and employees.

Empower's instructional program is expected to align with applicable Alabama Courses of Study and state curriculum requirements. The Renewal Performance Report confirms that Empower's courses meet state curriculum guidelines and that the Family & Student Handbook states that performance standards are aligned to the Alabama Courses of Study.

However, Content Standards was rated "Approaches" in each year of the review period. This rating appears to reflect documentation and monitoring concerns rather than a finding that Empower's entire curriculum was misaligned with state standards. Specifically, Virtual Compliance Monitoring did not find evidence of curriculum being publicly available during Spring and Summer 2025. By Spring 2026, evidence of curriculum being made available to the public was documented.

The Renewal Performance Report also notes that the SY2023–24 technology compliance review found insufficient evidence demonstrating implementation of the Digital Literacy and Computer Science Course of Study, specifically because supporting lesson plans and digital portfolios were not provided. Importantly, the report confirms that this finding has since been completed. This experience reinforced for Empower that compliance requires not only implementing required programming but also maintaining and submitting sufficient evidence demonstrating implementation. During the renewal period, school leadership will continue strengthening documentation of curricu-

lum alignment, pacing, lesson implementation, digital-literacy requirements, and public access to curricular information.

Empower is also responsible for administering required state assessments and maintaining appropriately qualified personnel. The Renewal Performance Report rated Staff Qualifications “Meets” in every year of the contract term. Site visits confirmed leadership's efforts to employ certified personnel, while documents submitted through the Commission's monitoring system provided evidence that Empower followed statewide-testing guidelines.

Recruiting appropriately certified and highly qualified personnel has nevertheless been an ongoing operational challenge. Empower operates in a competitive educator labor market and has experienced significant enrollment and organizational growth during the charter term. As the school has expanded, staffing needs have increased not only for general education classrooms but also for specialized positions required to provide appropriate services to students with disabilities, English Learners, students requiring intervention, and other populations.

Empower has used the flexibility available to charter schools in hiring while continuing to work toward increasing the number of appropriately certified personnel. The Renewal Performance Report specifically recognizes leadership's efforts in this area.

The report also confirms that Empower's instructional support structure includes special education teachers, English Language Learner teachers, Reading Specialists, Math Specialists, a Behavior Interventionist, and Instructional Aides. Site visits additionally confirmed counselors, behavior technicians, social workers, and a gifted teacher.

Empower has continued developing systems for using assessment information to guide instruction. The Renewal Performance Report rated Data-driven Instruction “Meets” throughout the review period, while also noting that the Commission had limited formal evidence demonstrating how data was systematically being used to drive pedagogy beyond anecdotal site-visit observations. The report confirms, however, that assessment results were routinely presented to the Board through Academic Updates.

This finding has informed Empower's continued emphasis on more formalized data cycles, benchmark assessments, data meetings, instructional coaching, MTSS, small-group instruction, intervention, and progress monitoring. Moving forward, Empower will continue strengthening not only its use of data but also its documentation of how assessment results translate into instructional decisions.

Providing appropriate educational services to special populations represents one of Empower's most significant legal and educational responsibilities. The Renewal Performance Report specifically recognizes that publicly funded charter schools are required to accommodate students who qualify, or may qualify, for protections under IDEA, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Empower received an overall rating of “Meets” for Providing for Special Populations during every year of the review period. The individual measures for Policies & Procedures, Personnel Certification, SPED Population, ELL Population, Parent Outreach, and Least Restrictive Environment all received “Meets” ratings in each of the four years.

Empower maintains policies and procedures addressing students with disabilities through its Family & Student Handbook. The Renewal Performance Report specifically notes that the handbook outlines the special education referral process, Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), annual progress goals associated with students' IEPs, and equity considerations.

Personnel certification related to special populations also remained an area of compliance. The SY2023–24 LEA System Profile/Fiscal Review contained no findings regarding certifications to serve special populations.

Empower is also responsible for ensuring that students with disabilities are educated in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) appropriate to their needs. The Renewal Performance Report rated this measure “Meets” in every year and notes that the Family & Student Handbook addresses LRE while site visits provided evidence of inclusive practices for students receiving special education services.

As Empower's enrollment has grown, the complexity and number of student needs have also grown. This has required the organization to continually evaluate staffing, scheduling, intervention structures, classroom supports, related services, and facilities to ensure students receive required services while participating in the general educational environment to the greatest extent appropriate.

Empower similarly maintains responsibilities for identifying and serving students who are English Learners. The Renewal Performance Report rated ELL Population “Meets” in all four years and confirms that the Family & Student Handbook outlines supports for English Learners, references the legally required Home Language Survey, and explains the annual ACCESS assessment administered to students participating in the EL program.

As the student population changes, Empower must maintain sufficient staffing and systems to identify English Learners promptly, provide appropriate language-development supports, administer required assessments, communicate with families, and ensure students have meaningful access to the school's instructional program.

Family communication is also an important component of supporting special populations. Empower received “Meets” for Parent Outreach in all four years. The Renewal Performance Report notes that the school's website contains a Parent Engagement Plan, School-Parent Compact, and Parent Engagement Calendar, and that the Family Engagement Plan was approved by the Board.

These structures are particularly important for families navigating special education, English Learner services, intervention, and other student-support systems. Empower will continue working to ensure parents understand available services, procedural protections, assessment information, student progress, and opportunities to participate in educational decision-making.

The clearest area requiring improvement within the special-populations portion of the Renewal Performance Report is Equitable Access, which was rated “Does Not Meet” in all four years. Importantly, the report does not state that students with disabilities were denied participation. Rather, it states that there was no evidence available to confirm that students with special needs had equitable access to non-curricular activities.

Empower recognizes the importance of addressing both the practice and the documentation underlying this finding. In practice, students with disabilities are encouraged to participate fully in extracurricular, athletic, enrichment, and schoolwide activities alongside their peers. Students receiving special education services have successfully participated as members of Empower's athletic teams and other extracurricular programs. Their participation reflects the school's commitment to inclusion beyond the classroom and to ensuring that students with disabilities have meaningful access to the full student experience.

As Empower expands its extracurricular program, this commitment will remain central. Students have opportunities to participate in volleyball, basketball, track, the House System, clubs, enrichment activities, and other schoolwide programs, with band being added during the 2026–27 school year.

Empower will continue to encourage students with disabilities to pursue these opportunities based on their interests and strengths and, when appropriate, provide reasonable accommodations and supports that allow them to participate successfully.

The Renewal Performance Report finding therefore highlights a need to strengthen documentation of equitable access rather than establish a new practice of inclusion. During the renewal term, Empower will more intentionally maintain evidence demonstrating participation by students with disabilities in athletics, clubs, enrichment programs, House activities, and other non-curricular opportunities. This may include aggregate participation data, extracurricular rosters with personally identifiable information appropriately protected, program descriptions, accommodation procedures, and other documentation demonstrating that students with disabilities are invited, supported, and able to participate in the same opportunities available to their non-disabled peers.

Empower's goal is to ensure that inclusion is evident not only in the academic program and least restrictive environment, but throughout the entire school experience. Students with disabilities should have opportunities to learn, lead, compete, perform, create, build relationships, and represent Empower in the same meaningful ways as all other students.

Overall, the Renewal Performance Report demonstrates that Empower has successfully maintained the core educational systems necessary to operate a public charter school while simultaneously identifying several areas where stronger implementation evidence and documentation were necessary.

The most significant challenges identified in the report included documentation of curriculum and content standards, evidence of Digital Literacy and Computer Science implementation, documentation of systematic data-driven instructional practices, and evidence demonstrating equitable access to non-curricular opportunities for students with special needs. The report also demonstrates that several identified compliance concerns were subsequently corrected, including the Digital Literacy and Computer Science finding.

Empower's experience during the contract term has reinforced an important organizational lesson: implementation and documentation must occur together. It is not sufficient for a program, service, or practice to exist; the school must maintain evidence that demonstrates implementation, compliance, monitoring, and corrective action.

Despite the challenges described above, the Renewal Performance Report provides substantial evidence that Empower has met the educational-program obligations associated with operating a public charter school in Alabama. The school received "Meets" for Delivering the Educational Program and "Meets" for Providing for Special Populations in every year of the four-year review period.

During the renewal term, Empower will build upon this foundation by strengthening curriculum documentation and public accessibility; maintaining alignment with Alabama Courses of Study; continuing compliance with state assessment requirements; recruiting and retaining appropriately qualified personnel; strengthening documentation of data-driven instruction; maintaining appropriate special education, Section 504, and English Learner systems; and documenting equitable access to extracurricular and enrichment opportunities.

The organization's goal is not simply to remain technically compliant with the educational requirements applicable to Alabama public schools. Empower seeks to ensure that those requirements are translated into an educational program in which all students, including students with disabilities, English Learners, gifted students, and students requiring academic, behavioral, social-emotional, or other supports, have meaningful access to high-quality instruction, appropriate services, and the full educational experience available at Empower.

(d) Provide a narrative on providing a safe and positive learning environment. Address the challenges encountered over the review period in providing facility space for school operations, and actions taken to address those challenges. Include information on responding in case of an emergency. Refer to the Renewal Performance Report in your discussion. Attach supporting documentation.

Empower Schools of Alabama recognizes that students cannot fully engage in rigorous academic learning unless they are physically safe, emotionally supported, appropriately supervised, and provided with facilities and services that meet their basic needs. Providing a safe and positive learning environment therefore extends beyond building security. It includes emergency preparedness, health services, child nutrition, transportation, appropriate facility space, student support systems, staff training, and the development of a school culture in which students feel safe, known, and supported.

The Renewal Performance Report provides strong evidence that Empower has generally met these responsibilities throughout the charter contract term. Empower received an overall rating of “Meets” for Providing a Safe & Positive Learning Environment in each year of the review period—SY2022–23, SY2023–24, SY2024–25, and SY2025–26.

Within this indicator, Empower received “Meets” in all four years for Child Nutrition Program, Facility Security, Fire Safety, Secure in Place, School Facility, Transportation, and Insurance Coverage. The measures for Crisis Management Plan, Prevention & Support, and Health Services initially reflected areas requiring improvement but subsequently improved to “Meets,” demonstrating corrective action during the contract term.

Maintaining secure facilities has remained a priority throughout Empower's growth. The Renewal Performance Report confirms that Empower follows a rigorous visitor check-in process, maintains exterior doors locked from the outside, and follows established facility-security protocols, as observed during Commission site visits.

Access points are closely monitored, visitors are required to follow established screening and check-in procedures, and exterior doors are maintained in a secured condition. Staff members share responsibility for maintaining building security by monitoring students and visitors, following arrival and dismissal procedures, and reporting safety concerns to school leadership.

The Renewal Performance Report also found no findings related to Empower's Health, Safety, ADA and Fire Inspections/Requirements, and site-visit observations confirmed the presence of secure-in-place emergency signage.

These systems provide important layers of protection while allowing the school to maintain a welcoming environment for students and families.

One of Empower's most significant operational challenges during the contract period has been securing sufficient and appropriate facility space to keep pace with rapid enrollment growth and the expansion of the school's K–8 program.

Although the Renewal Performance Report rated School Facility “Meets” during all four years, the adequacy of available space has become increasingly challenging as Empower has grown. Meeting basic facility requirements and having sufficient space to optimally deliver every component of the educational program are not necessarily the same measure. As enrollment has expanded, Empower has had to continually reassess classroom capacity, intervention and enrichment spaces, student-support areas, extracurricular spaces, food-service operations, and opportunities for future growth.

Empower has responded to its growth through the development of a two-campus model, with students distributed between the Lower and Upper Campuses. This structure has allowed the organization to continue serving increasing numbers of students while maintaining its K–8 educational program.

The Lower Campus has presented a particularly significant capacity challenge. To provide additional classroom space, Empower initiated the addition of two modular units that will ultimately provide four additional classrooms.

Construction and installation delays, however, prevented the modular classrooms from being available at the beginning of the 2026–27 school year.

As an interim solution, fourth-grade students have been temporarily housed in the Lower Campus gymnasium while the modular project is completed. Because the gym has been needed for classroom space, breakfast and lunch have been served in classrooms, and physical education has had to be adapted through classroom-based activities and use of outdoor space when weather conditions permit. These arrangements are temporary responses to a construction timeline that extended beyond the school's anticipated completion date.

The organization has continued working with contractors and other parties involved in the project to bring the modular classrooms online as quickly as possible while maintaining safe and appropriate school operations during the transition.

Empower recognizes that continued enrollment growth cannot be supported indefinitely through temporary space adjustments. Facility planning has therefore become a significant component of the organization's long-term strategy.

Empower's strategic planning documents acknowledge that its existing facilities have served the school but also present operational and programmatic limitations, including constraints on specialized programming in areas such as arts, science, and athletics.

The facilities strategy includes completing the lease-to-own process for the St. Francis property, expanding immediate capacity through modular classrooms, exploring opportunities for additional property, and pursuing a longer-term permanent facility solution.

The strategic plan also specifically identifies the addition of modular classroom space and a safe-room storm shelter as a means of addressing immediate instructional capacity and safety needs while longer-term facility plans are developed.

Accordingly, facility growth during the renewal period will be approached not simply as an enrollment issue but as a student safety, instructional quality, and program-access issue. As Empower grows, additional space is needed for classrooms as well as intervention, enrichment, athletics, arts, counseling, mental-health services, special education, and other components of a comprehensive K–8 program.

Empower maintains a Crisis Management Plan and emergency-response procedures designed to guide staff actions in the event of an emergency. The Renewal Performance Report confirms that a crisis-management plan is in place and that Commission records contain current emergency contact information. It also reports that the Health Services/Nursing compliance review contained no findings regarding emergency plans for students with chronic health conditions.

Emergency preparedness includes procedures for responding to circumstances requiring evacuation, secure-in-place actions, severe-weather response, fire response, medical emergencies, and other potential threats or crises. Staff are expected to know their responsibilities, follow established emergency protocols, maintain appropriate supervision of students, and respond to directions from school leadership and emergency personnel.

The Renewal Performance Report demonstrates improvement in this area over the contract period. Crisis Management Plan was rated “Approaches” in SY2022–23 and SY2023–24 before improving to “Meets” in SY2024–25 and SY2025–26. Similarly, Prevention & Support improved from “Approaches” during the first two years to “Meets” during the final two years.

The report explains that the SY2023–24 School Safety compliance review identified missing documentation related to the School Emergency Operations Plan Core Planning Team, annual safety-plan review, and multi-drill training activities. Those findings have since been marked completed.

Additionally, the compliance review identified missing documentation for required annual training and safety drills. Those findings have also been corrected and marked complete.

These findings provided an important lesson for Empower regarding both emergency preparedness and documentation. It is not sufficient for staff to understand how to respond during an emergency; the organization must also systematically plan, train, conduct required drills, review emergency procedures, document completion, and maintain evidence demonstrating compliance.

Health services are another essential component of providing a safe school environment. The Renewal Performance Report confirms through site visits that Empower has personnel providing health services.

The report also identifies challenges encountered during the contract period. Health Services was rated “Approaches” in the first two years before improving to “Meets” in the final two years. Compliance monitoring identified concerns related to implementation of the Alex Hoover Act, incomplete student health-care plans, and deficiencies in health information documented within PowerSchool. Importantly, the Renewal Performance Report confirms that subsequent evidence demonstrated corrective action and that the finding was marked complete.

Current practices emphasize accurate health documentation, appropriate individual health plans, communication of critical medical information to appropriate personnel, and preparedness to respond when a student experiences a medical emergency.

Fire safety and secure-in-place procedures remained areas of consistent compliance throughout the contract term. Empower received “Meets” for both Fire Safety and Secure in Place in every year reviewed.

The Renewal Performance Report notes that the applicable health, safety, ADA, and fire inspection review contained no findings. Site visits also confirmed secure-in-place emergency signage, and compliance monitoring contained no findings regarding secure-in-place protocols.

These systems are reinforced through drills, staff training, posted procedures, and established emergency-response expectations.

A safe and positive learning environment also requires attention to students' physical needs. Empower received “Meets” for the Child Nutrition Program in all four years, and Virtual Compliance Monitoring confirmed that the school maintains daily menus and a system wellness plan.

Transportation similarly received “Meets” throughout the review period, with compliance monitoring confirming that Empower informed ALSDE of its transportation needs and remained in compliance.

As Empower has grown, the school has continued strengthening these operational systems because safe transportation, adequate nutrition, health services, and secure facilities directly affect students' ability to attend school consistently and engage in learning.

Empower recognizes that physical security alone does not create a positive learning environment. Students must also experience belonging, positive relationships, appropriate behavioral supports, access to trusted adults, and opportunities to connect with the school community.

Accordingly, Empower complements its physical-safety systems with SEL supports, counseling, social work, mental-health partnerships, MTSS, positive behavior interventions, attendance support, and the school-wide House System. When students require therapeutic support beyond the services directly available through school personnel, Empower works with outside therapy providers that can provide services on campus when appropriate, reducing missed instructional time and transportation burdens for families.

Athletics and extracurricular opportunities also contribute to a positive school culture. Students have opportunities to participate in volleyball, basketball, track, clubs, enrichment programs, and the House System, with band being added during the 2026–27 school year. These activities provide additional opportunities for students to establish positive relationships, develop leadership skills, build school pride, and feel connected to the Empower community.

The Renewal Performance Report demonstrates that Empower maintained an overall “Meets” rating for Providing a Safe & Positive Learning Environment throughout the entire review period, even as the organization experienced rapid growth and changing operational needs.

Just as importantly, the report demonstrates the school's capacity to respond to identified weaknesses. Crisis Management Plan, Prevention & Support, and Health Services each moved from “Approaches” to “Meets,” while identified compliance findings related to emergency planning, safety training and drills, health-care plans, and health documentation were subsequently corrected. Facility capacity remains one of Empower's most significant challenges entering the renewal period. The school has responded through a two-campus structure, modular classroom expansion, temporary space adjustments, and longer-term facility planning. Going forward, Empower will continue prioritizing facility solutions that provide sufficient instructional and programmatic space while maintaining appropriate safety, security, emergency preparedness, and accessibility.

Ultimately, Empower's goal is to ensure that every student enters a school environment that is physically secure, appropriately equipped, emotionally supportive, prepared for emergencies, and conducive to learning.

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(e)Provide a narrative on all outside accreditations obtained or sought with a description of how these accreditations fit into the school model. Evidence of specific accreditations appears in the supporting documentation section.

During the charter contract term, Empower Schools of Alabama pursued outside accreditation as an additional mechanism for validating the quality of its educational program and strengthening

its continuous-improvement processes. In addition to meeting the accountability and compliance requirements established by the Alabama State Department of Education and the Alabama Public Charter School Commission, Empower pursued Cognia accreditation as an external measure of educational and organizational quality.

During the 2024–25 school year, Empower's Upper Campus participated in the Cognia accreditation process. Following completion of the review process, Empower received final approval as "Accredited – Needing Improvement" at the Cognia Global Commission meeting on October 31, 2025. Empower received a final Index of Education Quality (IEQ) score of 244.

Empower recognizes that the designation and IEQ score identify areas in which continued improvement is necessary. At the same time, the successful completion of the accreditation process represents an important milestone in the organization's development. Empower views accreditation not as a one-time event or an endpoint, but as a continuous-improvement journey. The accreditation result affirms both the progress the school has made and the work that remains necessary to strengthen academic and organizational outcomes.

Cognia accreditation fits closely with Empower's school model because the organization emphasizes continuous improvement, data-informed decision-making, effective instructional practices, positive school culture, stakeholder engagement, organizational accountability, and measurable student outcomes. Empower's strategic planning materials specifically identify Cognia Performance Frameworks among the external benchmarks and reference resources used to support organizational continuous improvement.

At the time of the Cognia accreditation process, Empower's primary classroom observation instrument was the Alabama Teacher Observation Tool (ATOT). ATOT provided the school with a consistent structure for observing classroom instruction and examining instructional practices during the accreditation period.

Since that time, Empower has intentionally strengthened its approach to teacher observation and evaluation. Empower has moved beyond relying solely on ATOT and has developed a more intentional teacher observation and evaluation system focused on teacher development, instructional improvement, accountability, and student outcomes.

This change reflects an important lesson from the accreditation and continuous-improvement processes: simply observing classroom practice is not sufficient. Teachers must receive clear expectations, timely and actionable feedback, coaching, professional development, opportunities to practice and improve, and ongoing monitoring of their progress.

The current teacher observation tool examines areas including standards alignment, instructional delivery, checks for understanding, questioning and rigor, student engagement and discourse, classroom environment and culture, relationships, expectations, and evidence of data use.

The updated observation process is also incorporated into Empower's broader Educator Excellence Framework, creating a more comprehensive approach to teacher evaluation and development. This evolution demonstrates that Empower has not treated accreditation as a static designation. Instead, the organization continues to examine its practices, identify areas requiring improvement, and adjust systems when a stronger approach can better support educators and students.

Empower views its IEQ score of 244 and "Accredited – Needing Improvement" designation as both validation and direction. The accreditation confirms that Empower has established foundational systems upon which it can continue to build, while the designation makes clear that additional work is required to achieve the level of educational quality the organization expects for its students and families.

Accordingly, the accreditation results are being incorporated into Empower's broader continuous-improvement work. Areas such as instructional quality, teacher development, leadership effectiveness, data-driven decision-making, student achievement, school culture, stakeholder engagement, and organizational systems will continue to receive intentional attention throughout the renewal period.

Empower's approach is to use external feedback alongside internal performance data to identify gaps, establish measurable priorities, implement improvement strategies, and monitor whether those strategies are producing stronger outcomes. The transition from ATOT to a more intentional teacher observation and evaluation framework is one example of this continuous-improvement approach.

Although Empower's current Cognia accreditation applies specifically to the Upper Campus, the organization intends to expand the accreditation process as its two-campus model continues to mature. During the next Cognia accreditation cycle, Empower plans to pursue full district accreditation encompassing both the Lower and Upper Campuses.

This represents an important next step as Empower has evolved into a two-campus K–8 organization. District accreditation will allow the organization to demonstrate that expectations for instructional quality, leadership, student support, continuous improvement, stakeholder engagement, and organizational effectiveness are consistently implemented across Empower rather than being limited to one campus.

The period leading to the next accreditation cycle will therefore be used to further align curriculum and instruction, assessment and data practices, teacher observation and evaluation, professional development, leadership expectations, student-support systems, school improvement processes, and organizational procedures across both campuses.

The goal is not simply to extend an accreditation designation. Empower seeks to demonstrate that students experience a coherent and high-quality K–8 educational program regardless of which campus they attend.

Empower has established an ambitious goal for its next accreditation cycle. The organization intends to move beyond its current "Accredited – Needing Improvement" designation and IEQ score of 244 toward "Accredited with Merit," with a targeted IEQ score of 320–360.

Reaching this level will require sustained improvement rather than isolated initiatives. Empower understands that improvements in academic outcomes must be accompanied by stronger instructional practices, consistent leadership systems, effective professional development, meaningful stakeholder engagement, and sound organizational structures.

This goal also aligns with the purpose of the charter renewal period. The next contract term provides Empower with an opportunity to build upon the organizational foundation developed during its initial years, respond intentionally to areas identified through both the Renewal Performance Report and Cognia accreditation process, and demonstrate measurable improvement over time.

Ultimately, Empower views its current accreditation status as a starting point for the next phase of improvement rather than a final destination. The IEQ score of 244 establishes a clear baseline. The goal of reaching Accredited with Merit and an IEQ score of 320–360 provides the organization with a measurable long-term target toward which leadership, staff, the governing Board, students, families, and community partners can collectively work.

(f) If applicable, provide a narrative on all improvement plans the school has been placed upon during the contract term (CSI, TSI, etc.). Include the rationale for being placed upon the plan, the length of the plan, steps the school has taken for improvement, and the outcomes from the plan. Attach supporting documentation.

The Empower Lower Campus was identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) beginning with the 2025–2026 school year based on academic performance associated with the school's state-assigned school code. The Lower Campus is expected to participate in the CSI improvement process for approximately three years, during which the school and district will implement, monitor, evaluate, and refine a comprehensive improvement plan designed to improve student achievement and strengthen instructional systems.

An important factor in understanding this designation is Empower's transition from a single-school structure to separate Lower and Upper campuses. The Lower Campus retained Empower's original school code, which had previously represented the academic performance of Empower when the organization operated as one school. As a result, the historical accountability performance associated with that school code followed the Lower Campus when Empower transitioned to its current two-campus structure.

This distinction is particularly important when reviewing the rationale for the Lower Campus's CSI identification. Prior to the 2026–2027 school year, third grade was the only state-tested grade located at the Lower Campus. Consequently, the historical accountability data attached to the Lower Campus school code were not generated exclusively by the students or grade levels subsequently assigned to the Lower Campus. The school code carried historical performance from the period when Empower operated as one school and served multiple tested grade levels.

Although this historical context is important for accurately interpreting the designation, Empower recognizes its responsibility to address the CSI identification fully. The district has not treated the school-code history as a reason to minimize or avoid the required improvement work. Instead, the designation has been used to intensify the district's focus on student achievement, instructional quality, intervention, professional learning, and continuous improvement.

District school improvement documentation establishes that academic and teacher data will be collected and reviewed to identify the factors contributing to the CSI designation. The district and Federal Programs will work with school leadership to review and revise improvement plans, conduct needs assessments and root-cause analyses, establish student achievement goals, and determine appropriate uses of School Improvement resources.

The Lower Campus was identified for CSI during the 2025–2026 school year and is expected to remain within the CSI improvement cycle for approximately three years, subject to Alabama State Department of Education requirements and the school's progress toward applicable exit criteria.

Because 2025–2026 represents the beginning of this formal CSI cycle, the outcomes presented at this stage should appropriately be characterized as initial or emerging outcomes, rather than final outcomes of a completed three-year improvement plan.

During the improvement cycle, Empower will continuously review student achievement, instructional practices, intervention effectiveness, teacher effectiveness, and implementation fidelity. The district's documented improvement process provides for ongoing monitoring and scheduled review check-points to ensure continuous improvement and alignment with district and state expectations.

Because the Lower Campus entered CSI beginning with the 2025–2026 school year, Empower is still in the early stages of the approximately three-year improvement cycle. Therefore, it would be premature to characterize current results as the final outcomes of the CSI plan. However, the district can demonstrate important baseline information, early progress, and systems that have been established to support improvement.

The Lower Campus currently has an accountability score of 65. Additionally, 79.6% of third-grade students demonstrated sufficient/proficient reading performance, providing an important indicator of progress in an area that has received significant instructional attention.

The third-grade results are especially relevant because third grade was the only state-tested grade at the Lower Campus prior to the 2026–2027 school year. These results therefore provide a more direct measure of the academic performance generated by the students and instructional program operating within the Lower Campus than historical accountability results attached to the original school code.

At the same time, Empower recognizes that substantial improvement remains necessary. The district will use the approximately three-year CSI period to strengthen Tier I instruction, MTSS and intervention, literacy and mathematics instruction, instructional coaching, professional learning, student data ownership, and leadership monitoring.

Beginning with the 2026–2027 school year, the Lower Campus's changed grade configuration will also provide additional campus-specific academic data. Over the course of the CSI cycle, this will allow Empower and the authorizer to evaluate the Lower Campus based increasingly upon academic outcomes generated by the students and grade levels actually served at that campus.

At the time of this renewal application, the Lower Campus's CSI plan should be considered an active improvement plan rather than a completed intervention. Empower is implementing the required improvement strategies and will continue monitoring progress throughout the approximately three-year CSI cycle.

The district's existing CSI framework includes multiple-data-source reviews, analysis of instructional practices and intervention structures, root-cause analysis, evidence-based strategies, defined goals, and scheduled monitoring checkpoints.

Therefore, the ultimate outcome of the CSI designation cannot yet be reported. Instead, Empower will continue documenting annual progress, implementation fidelity, student achievement trends, changes in accountability indicators, and progress toward meeting the state's criteria for successful completion of the CSI improvement process.

This wording makes the chronology much stronger for the renewal application because it distinguishes three separate facts: the historical scores attached to the original school code, the 2025–2026 CSI identification, and the approximately three-year improvement period that follows the identification. It also prevents the renewal narrative from inadvertently suggesting that Empower has already completed three years of CSI without exiting the designation.

File 1

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File 2

File name: CSI Designation Email Nov 12 2026.pdf
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File 3

File name: Empower_Schools_of_Alabama_Lower_Campus_2025-2026_Theory_Of_Action_2026-08-25_14-58-06.pdf
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File 4

File name: Empower_Schools_of_Alabama_Lower_Campus_2025-2026_Strategy_Map_2026-08-25_14-58-06.pdf
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File 5

File name: Empower_Schools_of_Alabama_Lower_Campus_2025-2026_Annual_Improvement_Plan_2026-08-25_14-58-06.pdf
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(g)Provide a narrative on the non-financial findings from the most recent ALSDE Compliance Monitoring report. Address actions taken to be in compliance.

Empower Schools of Alabama takes seriously its responsibility to comply with all applicable requirements of the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE), as well as state and federal laws governing the operation of public schools. The most recent ALSDE Comprehensive Compliance Monitoring review, conducted during the 2023–2024 school year, identified several non-financial areas requiring corrective action or strengthened documentation. The primary areas of concern were educator certification, technology planning and integration, and school safety. The remaining reports reviewed, including transportation, special education, health services/nursing, counseling and guidance, and school improvement, did not identify comparable non-financial findings requiring corrective action.

The Educator Certification review identified concerns related to certification and assignment of instructional personnel. Specifically, ALSDE found that three individuals were assigned to courses for which they were not properly certified and four individuals were teaching without an Alabama certificate. ALSDE required the LEA to provide a plan explaining how the individuals would obtain appropriate certification or how the positions/courses would be assigned to properly certified personnel. The initial review also identified employee background checks as an area of concern;

however, subsequent review confirmed that Empower was in compliance with ALSDE requirements regarding criminal-history background checks for employees with unsupervised access to students.

In response, Empower strengthened its human resources and certification review processes. Certification status and teaching assignments are reviewed as part of hiring and scheduling, and the district works with employees who are pursuing certification to ensure that appropriate certification pathways are identified and monitored. The district has also placed increased emphasis on recruiting properly certified personnel and aligning instructional assignments with each educator's approved teaching field. Certification is now treated as an ongoing compliance responsibility rather than an item reviewed only during state monitoring. Background clearance is similarly verified as part of the employment process before employees are permitted unsupervised access to students.

ALSDE's Technology Compliance Monitoring identified deficiencies in the district's technology planning documentation. At the time of monitoring, Empower did not have evidence of an ALSDE-approved LEA Technology Plan on file and did not have sufficient documentation demonstrating that the local technology plan was aligned with the State Technology Plan and developed through the required consultation process. ALSDE also found insufficient evidence demonstrating progress toward the goals and objectives of the technology plan or showing how advanced technology was being used to improve student academic achievement. Additionally, evidence was needed to demonstrate implementation of the 2018 Digital Literacy and Computer Science Alabama Course of Study. These findings carried a corrective-action due date of June 14, 2024.

Empower responded by strengthening the district's technology planning, documentation, and instructional technology processes. Technology planning is now more intentionally connected to instructional priorities, student access, digital learning, data governance, and district operations. The district has continued expanding student access to instructional devices and digital resources while increasing expectations that technology be meaningfully incorporated into classroom instruction. Documentation practices have also been strengthened so that lesson plans, professional development activities, technology inventories, instructional initiatives, and other evidence can demonstrate implementation rather than simply the availability of technology. The monitoring report itself recognized that Empower had an inventory tracking system, was increasing technology devices available for student instruction, and had established data-governance policies.

The most significant group of non-financial findings involved school safety documentation and procedures. ALSDE found that the required annual training for employees and volunteers had not been sufficiently documented. The required training encompasses school safety procedures, mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse or neglect, bullying prevention under the Jamari T. Williams Act, Erin's Law, suicide prevention, mental-health awareness, and related safety requirements.

The review also identified deficiencies regarding the establishment/documentation of a School Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) Core Planning Team and written EOP, completion of the annual school safety plan review, and related documentation requirements. In addition, ALSDE found that required monthly emergency drills had not been conducted or documented in accordance with applicable requirements and that the district's policies did not contain the required Gun-Free Schools Act provisions. These safety-related corrective actions were generally due by June 14, 2024.

Since that monitoring cycle, Empower has placed greater emphasis on formalizing and documenting its safety program. Emergency Operations Plans and school-level safety procedures are maintained and reviewed; required emergency drills are scheduled, conducted, and documented; and district and school administrators maintain supporting records of required safety activities. Annual staff training now incorporates required safety topics, and greater attention is given to maintaining agendas, sign-in sheets, dates, training duration, and other evidence necessary to demonstrate compliance. Policies and procedures have also been reviewed and updated to align with applicable state and federal safety requirements.

The district has additionally strengthened the physical security of its campuses. Access points are monitored, visitor screening protocols are in place, designated screening areas are utilized, and exterior doors are maintained in a locked and secured condition during the instructional day. These practices are part of a broader effort to move beyond technical compliance and establish consistent, sustainable safety procedures across both campuses.

It is important to note that the monitoring review did not identify systemic noncompliance across all operational areas. For example, Transportation I reflected compliance with requirements concerning safe transportation, evacuation drills, pre-trip inspections, student rosters, route documentation, driver drug testing, monthly vehicle inspections, and safety-oriented loading and unloading procedures. The School Improvement review did not contain findings requiring corrective action. Special education monitoring likewise reflected compliance across numerous indicators and procedures, including Child Find, disproportionality, and other IDEA-related requirements.

Overall, Empower Schools of Alabama used the 2023–2024 ALSDE Compliance Monitoring process as an opportunity to strengthen internal systems rather than addressing the findings as isolated compliance events. Corrective actions have focused on establishing clearer ownership of compliance responsibilities, strengthening documentation, reviewing policies and procedures, improving personnel credential monitoring, formalizing technology planning, and establishing more consistent school-safety processes.

The district's current leadership continues to emphasize continuous compliance and internal accountability. Compliance responsibilities are increasingly incorporated into routine district operations so that required documentation, certifications, trainings, drills, plans, and policies are reviewed throughout the year rather than assembled only when a monitoring visit is anticipated. This approach has strengthened Empower's organizational infrastructure and provides greater assurance that the conditions identified during the 2023–2024 monitoring cycle are not repeated.

(h)If applicable, provide a narrative on mission specific operational goals. Please include how these goals are measured and how the school determines success. Provide evidence of success. This section is optional.

Empower Schools of Alabama's mission-specific operational goals are designed to ensure that the organization has the people, systems, resources, facilities, and organizational capacity necessary to support its academic mission and provide students with a high-quality K–8 educational experience. While academic achievement remains central to Empower's work, the school recognizes that sustained academic improvement depends upon strong operational systems. Accordingly, Empower evaluates operational success through areas such as enrollment and family demand, financial sustainability, employee recruitment and retention, organizational capacity, student attendance and engagement, safe and appropriate facilities, effective student-support systems, and responsible governance.

These goals are measured through quantitative key performance indicators (KPIs), operational data, compliance measures, stakeholder feedback, financial reports, and periodic review by school leadership and the governing Board. Success is determined not simply by completion of an activity, but by whether the activity produces measurable progress toward established organizational outcomes.

One of Empower's most significant mission-specific operational goals has been to develop a sustainable K–8 school capable of serving an increasing number of families in the Bessemer community. Enrollment is measured through PowerSchool and internal enrollment tracking, with leadership monitoring total enrollment, available seats, applications, waitlists, returning students, new enrollment, and student attrition.

Evidence of success is demonstrated by Empower's substantial enrollment growth during the charter term. Enrollment increased from approximately 136 students in SY2022–23 to 255 students in

SY2023–24, 375 students in SY2024–25, and 398 students in SY2025–2026. By August 2026, Empower had 474 students registered and approximately 74 students on the waitlist. This growth demonstrates increasing family demand and the organization's ability to expand from its earlier operating model into a two-campus K–8 school system.

Empower does not measure enrollment success solely by filling seats. The organization also examines recurrent enrollment and reasons students leave during or between school years. Information regarding transportation, relocation, attendance expectations, the length of the school day, family circumstances, and other documented withdrawal reasons is used to identify operational barriers that may affect retention.

A second mission-specific operational goal is maintaining sufficient financial resources to support the educational program while positioning the organization for long-term sustainability. Financial performance is monitored through monthly financial statements, budget-to-actual reports, cash balances, Days Cash on Hand, operating margin, audits, and Board financial review.

Evidence of progress is demonstrated through Empower's financial recovery and strengthening financial position. The Renewal Performance Report documented recovery from a negative total margin in FY2023, followed by stronger financial performance in subsequent years. Empower's audits have also provided evidence of sound financial reporting and stewardship.

Success in this area is therefore measured by Empower's ability to meet its financial obligations, maintain appropriate liquidity, operate within available resources, produce sound audits, and direct financial resources toward the educational priorities established by the organization.

Empower has also established an operational priority around becoming a workplace capable of recruiting, developing, supporting, and retaining effective employees. This is measured through staff retention rates, vacancy information, certification status, employee evaluation results, professional-development participation, staff culture and climate surveys, and separation data.

Empower established an overall teacher-retention target of 75% for SY2026, with progressively higher targets as organizational systems mature. The school achieved approximately 75% teacher retention, meeting its established annual target. Staff perception data provide another measure of progress. The March 2026 Staff Culture and Climate Survey produced an overall 86% favorable result, exceeding the organization's established 70% staff-satisfaction target.

Empower nevertheless recognizes that meeting an annual target does not mean that the retention challenge has been resolved. The organization has identified the length of the school day as one factor affecting its competitiveness for effective teachers. This issue is being addressed through the renewal application with proposed scheduling changes intended to better balance instructional needs, professional-development time, and employee sustainability.

The organization has also strengthened its employee evaluation systems. The transition from ATOT to the Empower Educator Excellence Framework provides a more intentional approach to observation, evaluation, feedback, coaching, professional growth, and accountability. Similar evaluation structures have been developed for support personnel and school leaders. Operational success in this area will increasingly be determined not simply by retaining employees, but by retaining effective employees and developing the capacity of the existing workforce.

Because students cannot benefit fully from Empower's academic program unless they are consistently present and engaged, attendance and student belonging are treated as operational as well as academic priorities.

Attendance is monitored through student-information systems and school-level attendance processes. Leadership examines daily attendance, chronic absenteeism, truancy concerns, and barriers

affecting attendance. When concerns are identified, staff work with families to determine whether transportation, health, mental-health needs, family circumstances, or other barriers are contributing to absences.

Student engagement is also supported through the House System, SEL programming, athletics, extracurricular activities, clubs, counseling, and student-support services. These structures are intended to create meaningful relationships and strengthen students' connection to their school.

Empower uses student SEL and culture/climate survey information as an additional measure of success. Survey results provide leadership with information regarding student perceptions of belonging, relationships, engagement, safety, self-management, and other conditions affecting the student experience. These data allow the organization to evaluate school culture from the student perspective rather than relying solely on adult observations.

Empower has intentionally expanded its operational capacity to address students' mental-health, behavioral, and social-emotional needs. Success in this area is evaluated through counseling and social-work services, referrals, MTSS processes, SEL data, attendance patterns, behavior information, family communication, and access to outside providers.

A particularly important component of this model is Empower's partnerships with outside mental-health and therapy providers that can deliver services on-site. Students requiring services beyond those available directly from school personnel can be referred to partnering providers. When services are delivered at school, students can receive needed support while minimizing missed instructional time, and parents experience fewer transportation and scheduling barriers associated with off-site appointments.

Empower considers this an important operational success because it connects student support directly to access. The objective is not simply to make referrals, but to remove practical barriers that might prevent students from receiving services.

Facility capacity has become an increasingly important mission-specific operational goal as enrollment has grown. Empower measures success through available classroom capacity, facility utilization, safety and inspection compliance, instructional-space availability, and the organization's ability to accommodate projected enrollment and programming.

The development of a two-campus model has enabled Empower to accommodate substantial enrollment growth. When additional Lower Campus capacity became necessary, the organization pursued modular expansion consisting of two modular units providing four additional classrooms.

The organization recognizes, however, that temporary and modular solutions are not sufficient as a permanent long-term strategy. Empower's operational goal is to secure facilities that can support not only classroom enrollment but also special education, intervention, counseling, mental-health services, arts, athletics, extracurricular activities, food service, and other components of a comprehensive K–8 program.

Success during the renewal period will therefore be measured by the organization's ability to increase permanent capacity while maintaining safe, appropriate, and financially sustainable facilities.

Empower maintains an operational goal of providing safe, reliable systems for students and employees. Performance is evaluated through safety inspections, emergency plans and drills, transportation operations, health-services compliance, visitor-management procedures, facility security, child nutrition operations, and corrective-action monitoring.

Evidence of success includes the correction of previously identified compliance concerns involving emergency planning, safety training and drills, health-care plans, and student health documentation. Empower has also transitioned key functions such as transportation and Child Nutrition toward greater internal operational control, allowing leadership to more directly monitor service quality and respond to family and student needs.

The school continues to strengthen emergency-response protocols and staff responsibilities so that employees understand how to respond during medical emergencies, severe weather, fire, secure-in-place situations, student elopement, and other potential emergencies.

Empower also uses external evaluation as a measure of organizational quality. The Upper Campus completed the Cognia accreditation process and received final approval as “Accredited – Needing Improvement” on October 31, 2025, with an Index of Education Quality (IEQ) score of 244.

While the designation demonstrates that continued improvement is necessary, successful accreditation establishes an external benchmark against which Empower can evaluate its organizational systems. The next operational goal is to pursue full district accreditation encompassing both campuses during the next accreditation cycle.

Empower has also established the goal of progressing from its current status to “Accredited with Merit,” targeting an IEQ score of 320–360. This provides the organization with a measurable external indicator of improvement rather than relying exclusively on internally established measures.

Empower determines success through a combination of measurable outcomes, year-over-year trends, established targets, stakeholder perceptions, compliance results, and evidence that identified weaknesses result in corrective action. No single indicator is considered sufficient to determine organizational effectiveness.

Operational goals are increasingly incorporated into leadership dashboards, strategic priorities, Board reporting, department-level monitoring, and leadership evaluations. When a measure is below target, leadership examines the underlying cause, establishes corrective actions, assigns responsibility, and monitors subsequent performance.

This approach is particularly important because operational systems are interconnected. Staff retention affects instructional continuity; attendance affects academic achievement; transportation affects attendance; mental-health supports affect engagement and attendance; facilities affect enrollment and programming; and financial sustainability determines whether the organization can maintain all of these services.

Taken collectively, Empower can demonstrate progress toward its mission-specific operational goals through significant enrollment growth and continued family demand; achievement of the SY2026 teacher-retention target; an 86% favorable staff culture and climate result; strengthened employee evaluation systems; expansion to a two-campus K–8 model; increased mental-health and student-support capacity; development of on-site therapy partnerships; correction of identified safety and health compliance findings; improved financial sustainability; Cognia accreditation of the Upper Campus; and development of measurable goals for district accreditation and Accredited with Merit status.

These results do not suggest that Empower’s operational development is complete. Rather, they demonstrate an organization that has grown rapidly, identified areas requiring improvement, and increasingly developed the systems necessary to measure performance and respond when results fall below expectations.

During the renewal term, Empower intends to further institutionalize this work through clear departmental KPIs for Academics/School Improvement, Mental Health and Student Services, Attendance, Human Resources, Transportation, Child Nutrition, Facilities, Technology and Safety, and Finance/Business Operations. This will allow organizational success to be measured consistently and ensure that operational departments remain directly connected to Empower's central mission of creating the conditions in which students can learn, grow, and succeed.

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Element Review
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C) LOOKING FORWARD: Plans for the Renewal Term

1. Adjustments to the Performance Framework

Status: Completed

Form Result

Adjustments to Performance Framework

This section gives the school the opportunity to address and change aspects of the performance framework to reflect the means the school will use to measure success during the upcoming renewal term.

(a) Describe and state the rationale for any proposed changes in targets for the standardized academic performance measures as stated in the existing Performance Framework.

Empower Schools of Alabama proposes to retain the standardized academic performance measures identified in the existing Performance Framework while revising the targets associated with those measures to establish a clear, progressive, and measurable improvement trajectory during the renewal term.

The existing Performance Framework identifies Academic Achievement as the percentage of students proficient on the Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program (ACAP) and Academic Growth as the percentage of students meeting annual growth targets on ACAP. The Framework specifically states that these indicators were selected in alignment with the Alabama State Department of Education School Report Card and are intended to provide multiple data points for measuring school success.

Empower is not proposing to replace ACAP as the standardized measure or reduce the school's accountability for student achievement. Instead, Empower proposes establishing annual performance targets that begin with the school's current academic baseline and require sustained year-over-year improvement.

This approach provides a more meaningful mechanism for evaluating whether the school's academic improvement strategies are producing measurable results throughout the renewal period.

Academic Achievement – ACAP Proficiency

For SY2025–26, Empower's ACAP proficiency results were:

Content Area	SY2025–26 Baseline	Proposed Year 1	Proposed Year 2	Proposed Year 3	Proposed Year 4
ELA	35.9%	e40%	e45%	e50%	e55%
Mathematics	6.8%	e12%	e20%	e28%	e35%
Science	24.5%	e30%	e35%	e40%	e45%

These proposed targets are intended to establish minimum annual expectations rather than aspirational end-of-contract goals only. Each year of the renewal term would therefore provide a defined checkpoint for determining whether Empower is progressing at an appropriate rate.

The most aggressive improvement trajectory is proposed for Mathematics, where the current proficiency rate of 6.8% represents Empower's most significant academic shortfall. The proposed

targets would require mathematics proficiency to increase to at least 12% in Year 1, 20% in Year 2, 28% in Year 3, and 35% by Year 4. This represents substantial improvement from the current baseline and appropriately reflects the urgency of strengthening mathematics achievement.

ELA and Science targets similarly require sustained annual improvement. By the fourth year, the proposed targets would require ELA proficiency to increase from 35.9% to at least 55% and Science proficiency to increase from 24.5% to at least 45%.

Empower also proposes retaining Academic Growth, which the existing Performance Framework defines as the percentage of students meeting annual growth targets on ACAP.

Empower believes growth should remain an important component of the renewed Performance Framework because it provides critical information about the school's impact on students who enter significantly below grade level. The school proposes establishing progressive annual growth targets once the applicable validated ACAP growth baseline and methodology are confirmed.

The goal is for an increasing percentage of Empower students to meet or exceed annual ACAP growth expectations throughout the renewal period. This measure should complement, not replace, the proficiency targets. Empower should be expected to demonstrate both that students are making significant academic progress and that an increasing percentage ultimately reach grade-level proficiency.

A primary rationale for the proposed change is the significant growth and changing composition of Empower's student population during the current charter term. As enrollment has increased, Empower's tested cohorts have changed substantially from year to year. Each new enrollment cycle has brought additional students into the school, including students arriving with significant academic deficits.

This context is important when evaluating longitudinal academic performance because Empower is not measuring the progress of a static group of students from one year to the next. However, Empower does not present changing cohorts or students' academic starting points as reasons to lower expectations. Once students enroll at Empower, the school accepts responsibility for accelerating their learning.

For this reason, the proposed framework intentionally preserves both achievement and growth. Proficiency measures whether students have reached the state's academic standard; growth measures whether Empower is effectively moving students toward that standard. Evaluating both provides a more complete picture of school effectiveness, particularly for students entering multiple grade levels behind.

The proposed targets also better support annual accountability. Rather than establishing only a distant end-of-renewal goal, progressive annual targets allow school leadership, the governing Board, and the Commission to determine each year whether academic strategies are producing sufficient improvement. When performance falls below an annual target, Empower can identify the shortfall and adjust interventions, professional development, staffing, instructional supports, and school-improvement strategies before the next accountability cycle.

The proposed changes remain directly aligned with Empower's existing mission and Performance Framework. The Framework states that Empower's vision includes preparing scholars to "excel in every academic endeavor" and identifies personalized learning as an important component of the school's model.

The existing Framework further explains that personalized learning is intended to allow teachers, students, parents, and school leaders to track student progress and identify interventions that lead to

student growth. The proposed achievement and growth targets reinforce that original commitment by creating clearer measures of whether those interventions are actually improving student outcomes.

Empower's academic improvement work during the renewal period will continue to include MTSS and targeted intervention, small-group instruction, instructional coaching, curriculum implementation, benchmark and progress-monitoring assessments, data-driven instructional planning, teacher development, literacy supports, and intensified mathematics intervention. Annual ACAP achievement and growth targets will provide an external measure for determining whether these initiatives are collectively producing the intended results.

Success will be determined annually using official ACAP proficiency and growth results. Actual performance will be compared with the applicable annual target, and results will be reviewed by school leadership and the governing Board as part of the school-improvement process.

Interim benchmark and progress-monitoring assessments will be used throughout each school year to determine whether students are on trajectory toward the annual ACAP targets. These interim measures will support instructional decision-making; however, they will not replace ACAP as the standardized accountability measure identified in the Performance Framework.

The proposed changes therefore represent a commitment to greater specificity and accountability rather than reduced expectations. Empower is proposing to retain the state's standardized academic measures while establishing a transparent pathway from its current performance to substantially stronger academic outcomes.

By the end of the proposed four-year trajectory, Empower would be expected to reach at least 55% proficiency in ELA, 35% in Mathematics, and 45% in Science, while simultaneously demonstrating increasing percentages of students meeting annual ACAP growth expectations. These targets establish a challenging but measurable path toward the level of academic performance envisioned in Empower's mission and provide clear annual benchmarks by which the Commission, Board, school leadership, families, and community can evaluate the school's progress.

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(b)Provide an explanation for any new or refined mission specific measures to be included in a revised Performance Framework. Include a discussion on any mission specific measures that have been removed. All mission specific measures should include at least one metric with an associated target, in order to measure school success.

As part of the charter renewal process, Empower Schools of Alabama proposes refining its mission-specific measures so that the revised Performance Framework more clearly reflects the school's current K–8 model, personalized approach to learning, commitment to developing student agency, and emphasis on preparing students to succeed academically and advocate for themselves and their communities.

The existing Performance Framework identifies mission-specific measures connected to Empower's vision of preparing scholars to “excel in every academic endeavor” and its personalized learning model. The framework also emphasizes tracking student progress and identifying interventions that lead to student growth.

During the renewal term, Empower proposes moving toward a smaller number of clearly defined, measurable mission-specific indicators, each containing at least one metric and associated target. The intent is to strengthen accountability by ensuring that every mission-specific measure answers three questions: What are we measuring? How will we measure it? What result will demonstrate success?

The proposed refinements also distinguish mission-specific measures from standardized academic measures already captured elsewhere in the Performance Framework. ACAP proficiency and ACAP growth will continue to serve as standardized academic measures and therefore do not need to be duplicated as mission-specific indicators.

Proposed Mission-Specific Measure	Metric	Proposed Target	Rationale
Personalized Academic Growth	Percentage of students meeting or exceeding their annual growth goal on the school's approved benchmark assessment	e70% annually, increasing to e80% by end of renewal term	Measures whether personalized instruction, intervention, and progress monitoring are producing measurable student growth between annual state assessments.
Student Ownership of Learning	Percentage of students who can identify their current academic performance, individual learning goal, and next step for improvement, as measured through student data conferences/IPP documentation	e80% annually; e90% by end of renewal term	Directly reflects Empower's personalized-learning model and commitment to students understanding and advocating for their own learning needs.
Student Belonging & SEL	Percentage of students responding favorably to identified belonging/connectedness indicators on the school's SEL/culture survey	e80% favorable annually	Measures whether students experience the relationships, belonging, and supportive environment necessary to engage successfully in learning.
Student Engagement & Attendance	Percentage of students who are not chronically absent, using the applicable state definition	e85% annually, with year-over-year improvement until e90% is achieved	Recognizes that students must be present to benefit from personalized instruction, intervention, SEL, extracurricular activities, and other school supports.
Successful K–8 Transition	Percentage of eligible eighth-grade students successfully promoted and enrolled in a ninth-grade educational program for the following school year	e95% annually	Reflects Empower's responsibility to ensure students leave the K–8 program prepared to transition successfully into high school.

Family Partnership	Percentage of families responding favorably to identified engagement, communication, and school-partnership indicators on the annual family survey	at least 80% favorable annually	Measures the family-school collaboration embedded in Empower's mission and educational model.
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Empower proposes refining its existing personalized-learning measure into a more clearly measurable Personalized Academic Growth indicator. The existing framework appropriately emphasizes personalized learning and the ability to track student progress and identify interventions that lead to growth. However, the revised framework should connect that philosophy to a specific outcome.

Under the proposed measure, Empower would use its approved benchmark assessment to determine the percentage of students meeting or exceeding their established annual growth goal. The proposed target is at least 70% of students annually, increasing to at least 80% by the conclusion of the renewal term.

This measure is intentionally different from ACAP proficiency. It provides Empower with a mission-aligned mechanism for determining whether personalized instruction, small-group intervention, MTSS, progress monitoring, and other instructional supports are accelerating student learning throughout the year.

Empower also proposes adding Student Ownership of Learning as a refined mission-specific measure. Personalized learning should result in more than teachers having access to student data; students should increasingly understand their own academic performance and participate in setting and monitoring goals.

Empower proposes measuring the percentage of students who can demonstrate knowledge of their current academic performance, individual learning goal, and next instructional step, supported through student data conferences, Individualized Personalized Plans, or another consistently implemented documentation process.

The proposed target is at least 80% of students demonstrating ownership annually, increasing to 90% by the end of the renewal term.

This measure is particularly aligned with Empower's mission because it connects academic performance with the school's commitment to developing students who can advocate for themselves.

Empower proposes formalizing Student Belonging and SEL as a mission-specific measure. The school already collects SEL and culture/climate survey information, making this an opportunity to transform an existing practice into a defined accountability measure.

The metric would be the percentage of students responding favorably to predetermined survey indicators related to belonging, supportive relationships, school connectedness, and/or engagement, with a proposed target of at least 80% favorable responses annually.

This measure aligns with Empower's whole-child model, including its House System, counseling and mental-health supports, SEL programming, athletics, clubs, enrichment, and student-support structures. These initiatives should ultimately result in students experiencing a stronger sense of connection to the school community.

Empower proposes adding Student Engagement and Attendance because consistent attendance is a prerequisite for achieving the school's academic mission.

The proposed metric is the percentage of students who are not chronically absent, using the applicable state definition. Empower proposes a target of at least 85% annually, with year-over-year improvement until at least 90% is achieved.

Attendance is particularly appropriate as a mission-specific operational measure because it connects multiple components of Empower's model. Transportation, mental-health support, family engagement, school culture, student belonging, and extracurricular participation can all affect whether students attend consistently.

As Empower has developed into a full K–8 program, the revised Performance Framework should also reflect responsibility for preparing students for the transition beyond Empower.

The proposed Successful K–8 Transition measure would track the percentage of eligible eighth-grade students who are successfully promoted and subsequently enrolled in a ninth-grade educational program. Empower proposes a target of at least 95% annually.

This measure provides an important longer-term indicator of whether Empower is successfully preparing students to move from its K–8 environment into the next stage of their education.

Because Empower's mission explicitly emphasizes collaboration among scholars, educators, families, and community partners, family partnership should also be measurable rather than simply described as an organizational value.

Empower proposes using selected indicators from its annual family survey to measure perceptions of communication, engagement, responsiveness, and partnership, with a target of at least 80% favorable responses annually.

The same survey questions should be used consistently from year to year whenever possible so that performance can be compared longitudinally.

The revised Performance Framework should also eliminate unnecessary duplication. Empower proposes that any existing mission-specific measure that simply restates ACAP proficiency or ACAP academic growth be removed from the mission-specific section and maintained exclusively within the standardized academic portion of the Performance Framework. The existing framework already identifies Academic Achievement and Academic Growth using ACAP.

Maintaining the same outcome in two sections would not provide additional information about school performance.

Similarly, broad mission-specific statements describing personalized learning activities or implementation practices without a measurable student outcome should be refined rather than retained as stand-alone measures. For example, whether the school creates personalized plans, conducts data meetings, or provides intervention is important implementation evidence, but those activities alone do not demonstrate success. The revised measure should evaluate whether those practices result in measurable student growth and student ownership of learning.

Measures that primarily assess compliance with state or federal requirements should likewise remain within the appropriate organizational or compliance sections of the Performance Framework rather than being duplicated as mission-specific measures.

The intent is therefore not to remove important components of Empower's mission, but to consolidate overlapping measures and replace activity-based indicators with outcome-based measures that can be consistently evaluated.

For each mission-specific measure, Empower will establish the data source, calculation methodology, annual reporting timeline, responsible staff member or department, baseline, and annual target. Results should be reported to school leadership and the governing Board at least annually and incorporated into the school's continuous-improvement process.

Where performance meets or exceeds the established target, the measure will be considered successfully achieved. Where performance falls below target, leadership will analyze the underlying causes, establish corrective actions, and monitor progress during the following reporting cycle.

The proposed revisions create a mission-specific framework centered on six measurable outcomes: students grow academically, understand and take ownership of their learning, feel connected to their school, attend consistently, transition successfully from eighth to ninth grade, and benefit from strong family-school partnerships.

Together with the standardized ACAP achievement and growth measures, these indicators would provide a more comprehensive picture of whether Empower is fulfilling both the academic expectations and distinctive mission commitments of its charter.

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Element Review
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2. Changes to the School Model

Status: Completed

Form Result

Changes to the School Model

This section gives the school the opportunity to address and change aspects of the school model to reflect the anticipated needs during the upcoming renewal term. Substantive changes desired by the school, including, but not limited to, grade span served, program delivery, or target population may require additional data analysis and research-based evidence after the initial charter is renewed and before the new contract is finalized

(a)If applicable, provide changes to the school mission or vision statements.

None. Empower Schools of Alabama is not proposing any changes to its current mission or vision statements as part of the charter renewal process. The existing mission and vision continue to accurately reflect the organization's purpose, educational philosophy, and long-term commitment to collaboration, academic excellence, leadership development, student advocacy, and community engagement. As Empower enters the next charter term, the organization will remain focused on strengthening the implementation of its existing mission and vision rather than revising them.

(b)Describe and explain any desired changes to the student population served. This includes changes in the grade span, target community served, target student populations within that community, or substantive (+/- 25%) changes to enrollment targets. Please provide evidence to support the desired changes.

Empower Schools of Alabama does not anticipate changing its fundamental mission, target community, or K–8 grade configuration during the renewal period. Empower intends to remain a K–8 public charter school serving students and families in Bessemer and the surrounding community, with a continued commitment to providing families with access to a high-quality public school option.

The most significant desired change to the student population served is a gradual increase in enrollment capacity. This growth will be directly connected to facilities availability, community demand, staffing capacity, academic performance, and the financial sustainability of the organization.

Empower intends to maintain its current kindergarten through eighth-grade configuration throughout the renewal period. The organization is not proposing an expansion into high school grades at this time.

For the 2026–2027 school year, Empower operates two campuses:

- Lower Campus: Grades K–4
- Upper Campus: Grades 5–8

Maintaining a K–8 model allows Empower to provide students with greater instructional and cultural continuity during the elementary and middle school years. It also provides the organization with an opportunity to build a coherent academic progression from foundational literacy and numeracy in the early grades through increasingly rigorous middle-grades coursework, including A+ College Ready programming in grades 6–8.

Empower intends to continue serving Bessemer and the surrounding community. The organization was established to increase access to high-quality educational opportunities for families in this community, and that commitment will remain unchanged during the renewal period.

Empower does not intend to fundamentally alter its target student population or establish admissions practices designed to serve a more selective group of students. The school will remain open to eligible students consistent with Alabama charter school law and applicable enrollment and lottery requirements.

As a public charter school, Empower will continue serving students with a wide range of academic, socioeconomic, linguistic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs, including students with disabilities, English Learners, gifted students, students requiring academic intervention, and students performing above grade level.

Empower's most significant proposed change is the potential for enrollment to increase substantially during the renewal period. The organization's long-term facilities and enrollment planning contemplates the ability to serve up to approximately 900 students in grades K–8.

This represents a long-term capacity goal rather than an expectation that Empower will immediately enroll 900 students. Enrollment growth will occur incrementally and will be dependent upon available facilities and demonstrated community demand.

Empower has already demonstrated its ability to grow significantly. Enrollment increased from approximately 136 students in 2022–2023 to 412 students in 2023–2024 and 440 students in 2024–2025. This rapid growth demonstrates significant family interest in Empower's educational model and provides evidence supporting continued consideration of additional enrollment capacity.

While enrollment fell below the organization's intended projection during the 2025–2026 school year, current enrollment activity for 2026–2027 indicates renewed and significant demand. This experience has also reinforced the importance of making enrollment projections conservatively and basing staffing and financial commitments on confirmed enrollment rather than projections alone.

The primary constraint on Empower's long-term enrollment growth is physical capacity rather than a desire to restrict access to the school. Current facilities limit the number of classroom sections that can be added within each grade level and also restrict the amount of space available for extracurricular activities, specialized services, intervention, athletics, fine arts, and enrichment.

For this reason, Empower's enrollment and facilities strategies are directly connected.

During the renewal period, Empower intends to explore the possibility of identifying, acquiring, renovating, and/or constructing a permanent facility within the Bessemer City limits. The organization will also evaluate the feasibility of adding additional modular units at the Upper Campus as an interim or longer-term expansion strategy.

If additional facilities become available, Empower anticipates gradually increasing the number of classroom sections within individual grade levels. This would allow the organization to serve more students without changing its K–8 grade span.

Because growth to approximately 900 students would represent a substantive increase from Empower's current enrollment, the organization intends to approach expansion in phases.

Rather than establishing 900 students as an immediate enrollment requirement, Empower proposes treating this figure as the maximum anticipated long-term capacity during the renewal period, subject to facilities, demand, financial resources, and organizational performance.

Enrollment growth will be evaluated annually based on:

- Confirmed enrollment and waitlist demand;
- Student retention and re-enrollment rates;
- Available classroom and facility capacity;
- Academic performance and school improvement progress;
- Teacher recruitment and retention;
- Student support and exceptional education capacity;
- Transportation and Child Nutrition Program capacity;
- Financial projections and per-pupil revenue;
- Cash reserves and operating margins; and
- The organization's ability to maintain the quality of its academic and student-support programs.

This approach will ensure that enrollment growth does not outpace Empower's ability to serve students effectively.

Empower's historical enrollment demonstrates clear evidence of demand. The school grew from approximately 136 students to more than 400 students within a relatively short period. In addition, the school's Renewal Performance Report documents Empower's development as a K–8 organization, including the addition of eighth grade during the 2024–2025 school year.

Academic progress also supports the organization's long-term growth strategy. Empower has continued strengthening its instructional model around high-quality Tier I instruction, MTSS, intervention, assessment and data cycles, and specialized instructional support. The organization's strategic plan specifically calls for implementation of the Alabama Literacy and Numeracy Acts, expansion of targeted intervention, continued use of ACAP, iReady, DIBELS, and Benchmark data, and investment in specialized instructional personnel.

These investments are intended to ensure that growth in enrollment is accompanied by growth in the organization's capacity to meet the academic needs of a diverse student population.

As enrollment increases, Empower will remain committed to serving students who may require additional academic and student-support services. Growth will therefore include corresponding planning for exceptional education, English Learner services, gifted education, intervention, mental health and counseling services, transportation, Child Nutrition, and other student supports.

Empower does not view enrollment growth simply as increasing the number of available seats. Expansion must include the infrastructure necessary to ensure that all students who enroll have equitable access to the academic, extracurricular, and support services necessary to succeed.

Ultimately, Empower's desired change to the student population served is one of capacity rather than mission. The organization intends to remain a K–8 public charter school rooted in and serving the Bessemer community while creating opportunities for more families to access its educational program.

If community demand, facilities, academic performance, staffing, and financial resources support expansion, Empower desires to develop the capacity to serve up to approximately 900 K–8 students over time. Growth will be deliberately phased and will occur only when the organization can demonstrate that additional enrollment can be accommodated without compromising academic quality, student services, organizational culture, or financial sustainability.

The goal is therefore not growth for the sake of becoming larger. The goal is to responsibly expand access to Empower while maintaining the quality, relationships, academic expectations, and student-centered supports that define the organization.

Documents upload – supporting documentation **File name:** Evidence to Support Student Population Change.pdf

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(c)Describe and explain any desired changes to the academic program. This includes significant changes to curriculum, delivery methods or assessment methods. Include changes to the school schedule or calendar. Please provide evidence to support the desired changes. This section is optional.

Empower Schools of Alabama continues to refine its academic program based on student achievement data, instructional needs, state requirements, and the organization's commitment to providing a rigorous and coherent K–8 educational experience. As Empower enters its next charter term, several changes have been implemented or are planned related to curriculum, instructional delivery, assessment practices, and the structure of the school day.

These changes are intended to strengthen curriculum alignment, instructional rigor, intervention and acceleration, teacher professional development, and overall student achievement while establishing greater consistency across grade levels and campuses.

Empower has revised the instructional schedule to provide a consistent Monday–Thursday academic schedule while maintaining an early-release schedule on Fridays. The adjustment to the daily end time is designed to balance the need for sufficient instructional time with the organization's ability to recruit and retain highly qualified educators. As Empower competes with surrounding school systems and other educational organizations for talented staff, maintaining a competitive and sustainable work schedule is an important component of employee recruitment, satisfaction, and retention. The revised schedule allows Empower to preserve the instructional programming necessary to support student achievement while creating a work environment that is more attractive and sustainable for high-quality educators.

The school schedule is:

Campus	Monday–Thursday	Friday
Lower Campus – Grades K–4	8:15 AM–3:15 PM	8:15 AM–1:15 PM
Upper Campus – Grades 5–8	8:00 AM–3:30 PM	8:00 AM–1:30 PM

The differentiated dismissal times between campuses also support operational needs, including transportation between two campuses.

The Friday early-release schedule is an intentional component of Empower's academic model. The shortened student day provides dedicated time for professional learning, collaborative planning, data analysis, curriculum internalization, intervention planning, and other activities designed to strengthen instructional practice. Protecting this time allows teachers and instructional leaders to regularly examine student performance and adjust instruction rather than waiting until the end of a grading period or assessment cycle.

Monday through Thursday, the schedule is structured to maximize instructional time while allowing for core instruction, small-group learning, intervention, acceleration, enrichment, and student support services.

A major priority for Empower is ensuring that students experience a coherent, standards-aligned curriculum that increases in rigor as they progress from kindergarten through eighth grade. Curriculum decisions have therefore been made based on alignment with Alabama standards, instructional quality, teacher usability, student needs, and preparation for increasingly rigorous secondary coursework.

English Language Arts – Grades K–5: Amplify

Empower will utilize Amplify for English Language Arts in grades K–5. The adoption is intended to strengthen the consistency and quality of literacy instruction across elementary grades while providing students with access to rigorous, knowledge-building texts and standards-aligned instruction.

The curriculum will complement Empower's continued emphasis on foundational literacy and the Science of Reading. Teachers will continue using student data to identify students requiring additional support and provide targeted small-group instruction and intervention.

This change is particularly important as Empower continues working to improve literacy achievement across all elementary grade levels. Empower's recent performance provides evidence that focused literacy efforts can produce meaningful results. Most notably, 79.6% of Empower's third-grade students demonstrated sufficient or proficient reading performance on the 2026 ACAP Reading assessment. The organization intends to build upon this progress by strengthening curriculum coherence from kindergarten through fifth grade.

Mathematics – Grades K–5: Curriculum Associates

For mathematics in grades K–5, Empower will utilize Curriculum Associates. This curriculum provides a standards-aligned approach to mathematics instruction and supports the development of conceptual understanding, procedural fluency, problem solving, and mathematical reasoning.

The curriculum also supports Empower's broader approach to using assessment information to differentiate instruction. Teachers will use student performance data to determine when students require additional intervention, small-group support, or acceleration.

The adoption also aligns with Empower's continued focus on improving mathematics achievement and meeting the expectations of the Alabama Numeracy Act. Mathematics instruction will emphasize grade-level standards while ensuring that students with unfinished learning receive targeted support without being denied access to grade-level content.

Grades 6–8: A+ College Ready

One of the most significant academic changes at the Upper Campus is the implementation of A+ College Ready for grades 6–8. Empower's participation in A+ College Ready is designed to increase academic rigor and better prepare middle school students for advanced coursework when they transition into high school.

The program provides teachers with rigorous curricular resources, intensive professional development, instructional support, and strategies designed to strengthen student readiness for college-preparatory and advanced coursework.

This is especially important for Empower's long-term K–8 academic strategy. The organization's responsibility does not end when students complete eighth grade. Empower seeks to ensure students leave the Upper Campus academically prepared to successfully transition into ninth grade and ultimately access advanced high school coursework, career pathways, dual enrollment, Advanced Placement opportunities, and postsecondary education.

Curriculum changes will be supported by continued refinement of Empower's instructional model. The organization will maintain its emphasis on high-quality core instruction combined with differentiated small-group instruction, intervention, acceleration, and enrichment.

Classroom instruction will continue to incorporate:

- Standards-aligned, grade-level core instruction;
- Small-group instruction based on identified student needs;
- Targeted literacy and mathematics intervention;
- Acceleration for students who have demonstrated mastery;
- Regular checks for understanding and exit tickets;
- Student discourse and higher-order thinking;
- Data-informed instructional grouping;
- Individualized supports through MTSS; and
- Opportunities for enrichment and extended learning.

The goal is to ensure that intervention supplements rather than replaces access to rigorous grade-level instruction.

Empower will continue refining its assessment system to ensure that assessments provide actionable information rather than simply increasing the amount of testing experienced by students.

The assessment program will include a combination of state assessments, universal screeners, benchmark assessments, curriculum-based assessments, common assessments, and classroom formative assessments. Data from ACAP, DIBELS, i-Ready/Curriculum Associates resources, and other appropriate measures will be used to monitor achievement and growth.

Assessment results will inform instructional grouping, intervention, acceleration, professional development, and school improvement planning. Regular Data Talks and collaborative planning opportunities will provide teachers and leaders with structured opportunities to examine performance and determine appropriate instructional responses.

Empower's academic changes are informed by both student achievement results and the organization's continued improvement needs. Empower's overall state accountability score increased from 56 to 66, with the Upper Campus achieving a 71 and the Lower Campus achieving a 65. Additionally, 79.6% of third-grade students demonstrated sufficient or proficient reading performance on the 2026 ACAP Reading assessment.

These results demonstrate meaningful academic progress while also reinforcing the need to continue strengthening the instructional program. In particular, the Lower Campus remains an area of focused improvement, making the implementation of coherent K–5 ELA and mathematics curricula especially important.

Rather than responding to performance data by continually introducing new programs, Empower's strategy is to establish a smaller number of high-quality, aligned instructional resources and implement them with fidelity. The combination of Amplify in K–5 ELA, Curriculum Associates in K–5 mathematics, and A+ College Ready in grades 6–8 provides a clearer curricular structure across the K–8 continuum.

Empower's long-term goal is to create a rigorous and coherent K–8 academic experience in which students enter kindergarten with access to strong foundational instruction and leave eighth grade prepared to succeed in demanding high school coursework.

The changes to curriculum, instructional delivery, assessment, professional learning, and the school schedule are therefore interconnected. The revised schedule protects instructional time while creating regular opportunities for educators to collaborate and improve practice. Curriculum changes provide greater consistency and rigor. Assessment practices allow educators to identify needs and respond more quickly. A+ College Ready strengthens the academic bridge between middle and high school.

Collectively, these changes support Empower's continued evolution toward a more rigorous, data-informed, and sustainable academic model designed to ensure that students not only demonstrate academic growth while enrolled at Empower, but are also prepared for success beyond eighth grade.

(d) Describe and explain any desired changes to the governance structure. This includes changes to the size and composition of the governing board, the bylaws, or other governance policies. This section is optional.

As part of the charter renewal process, Empower Schools of Alabama has reviewed its governance structure to determine whether changes are necessary to strengthen Board effectiveness, accountability, continuity, and oversight during the next charter term. At this time, Empower is not proposing a fundamental change to its governance model. The school will continue to be governed by an independent governing Board responsible for fiduciary oversight, policy development, financial stewardship, strategic direction, evaluation of the Executive Director, and accountability for the school's performance.

The primary governance changes desired during the renewal period are therefore refinements to Board practices, policies, documentation, composition, and succession planning, rather than a restructuring of the governing body itself.

Empower desires to maintain a governing Board of sufficient size to provide effective oversight while remaining small enough to operate efficiently and maintain meaningful engagement from individual members. During the renewal period, the Board will continue evaluating its membership to ensure an appropriate combination of professional expertise, community representation, institutional knowledge, and independence.

Future Board recruitment will place particular emphasis on maintaining or strengthening expertise in areas such as finance and accounting, legal and governance matters, education and academic accountability, facilities and real estate, fundraising and philanthropy, human resources, organizational leadership, and community engagement. As Empower continues to grow, these areas of expertise will become increasingly important to the Board's ability to oversee a larger K–8 organization, future facility expansion, financial sustainability, and continued academic improvement.

The Board also desires to strengthen its succession-planning process so that vacancies are anticipated whenever possible and qualified candidates can be identified before the loss of critical expertise. New members should receive structured orientation regarding Empower's charter contract, Performance Framework, Board bylaws and policies, Alabama Open Meetings Act requirements, financial responsibilities, conflicts of interest, student performance expectations, and the distinction between governance and day-to-day school management.

One area of particular attention during the current charter term has been documentation of Board membership changes. The Renewal Performance Report indicated concerns regarding whether new Board members and resigning Board members were formally voted upon and documented in Board meeting minutes.

Empower has reviewed this concern and has strengthened its attention to documenting Board membership actions. Board minutes provide evidence of the formal consideration of the school's newest Board members and resignations during Board meetings. Moving forward, Empower intends to ensure that all appointments, resignations, officer elections, and other changes in Board membership are clearly presented for appropriate Board action and expressly recorded in the official minutes.

This refinement is intended to eliminate ambiguity regarding the composition of the governing Board and provide a clear public record demonstrating that membership changes have occurred in accordance with the school's governing documents.

Empower also desires to conduct a comprehensive review of its Board bylaws and governance policies during the renewal period. The purpose of this review is not to substantially alter the authority of the governing Board but to ensure that the governing documents accurately reflect the organization as it exists today.

Empower has grown significantly since its initial charter approval. The organization now operates as a two-campus K–8 school system with substantially greater enrollment, staffing, financial, facility, and operational responsibilities. Governance documents developed during the school's start-up phase should therefore be periodically reviewed to ensure that they continue to provide an appropriate structure for the organization.

Areas considered during the review should include Board size and membership requirements, terms and term limits, officer responsibilities, appointment and resignation procedures, committees, quorum and voting requirements, conflicts of interest, Board member orientation and training, Executive Director evaluation, financial oversight, succession planning, and procedures for amending the bylaws.

Any substantive amendments will be formally considered and approved by the governing Board and, where required, submitted to the Alabama Public Charter School Commission for approval.

A significant governance priority is continued adherence to the Alabama Open Meetings Act and the broader expectation that a public charter school conduct its governance activities transparently.

Current leadership works diligently to ensure that Empower's Board meetings are properly noticed, conducted, and documented. During the renewal period, the Board and school leadership will continue strengthening procedures related to meeting notices, agendas, minutes, executive sessions, voting, and retention of official governance records.

Particular attention will be given to ensuring that official minutes clearly document motions, votes, Board appointments and resignations, policy approvals, financial actions, Executive Director evaluations, contracts, and other substantive Board decisions. The objective is to ensure that the public record accurately reflects the oversight being exercised by the governing Board.

As Empower grows, the Board may also benefit from greater use of standing or ad hoc committees to conduct more detailed review before matters reach the full Board. Areas appropriate for committee-level attention may include Finance, Governance, Academic Performance, Facilities, and Development/Fundraising.

Committees would not replace the authority of the full governing Board. Instead, they would provide opportunities for Board members with relevant expertise to examine complex matters more deeply, make recommendations, and improve the quality of information available to the full Board for decision-making.

A Finance Committee, for example, could provide additional review of monthly financial statements, cash position, budget performance, debt obligations, facility financing, audits, and long-term financial projections. An Academic Committee could provide more consistent monitoring of ACAP achievement and growth, mission-specific measures, attendance, student outcomes, and progress toward Performance Framework targets. A Governance Committee could oversee Board recruitment, orientation, policy review, member attendance, training, and succession planning.

No change is proposed to the Board's responsibility for supervising and evaluating the Executive Director. Rather, Empower intends to continue formalizing and strengthening the evaluation process.

The Board has implemented a formal evaluation of the Executive Director, and Dr. Davis's evaluation was reviewed and approved by the Board at its August Board meeting, with the official Board minutes documenting that action. Going forward, the Executive Director evaluation process will continue to be tied to measurable organizational outcomes, including academic performance, financial health, organizational compliance, enrollment, staff development, student and family experience, and progress toward strategic priorities.

This provides a clear distinction between the roles of governance and management: the Board establishes expectations and evaluates organizational and executive performance, while the Executive Director remains responsible for the daily administration of the school system.

Empower also desires to reinforce through its governance policies the distinction between Board governance and school administration. As the organization has grown, maintaining this distinction has become increasingly important.

The governing Board is responsible for establishing policy, approving the budget, monitoring financial and academic performance, evaluating the Executive Director, ensuring compliance with the charter contract, and protecting the public interest. The Executive Director and administrative team are responsible for personnel management, instructional leadership, student services, operations, procurement within delegated authority, and other daily responsibilities.

Clarifying these roles protects the Board from becoming involved in routine operational matters while ensuring that school leadership remains appropriately accountable to the governing body.

The governance changes proposed for the renewal term are best characterized as a strengthening and maturation of Empower's existing governance model rather than a wholesale restructuring. As Empower has transitioned from a start-up charter school into a growing two-campus K–8 organization, its governance systems must similarly mature.

Accordingly, Empower proposes to focus the next renewal period on strategic Board recruitment, clearer documentation of membership changes and Board actions, periodic review of bylaws and governance policies, stronger committee structures, continued Open Meetings Act compliance,

formal Executive Director evaluation, Board training and succession planning, and clearer separation between governance and administration.

These refinements will allow Empower to preserve the strengths and continuity of its existing governance structure while ensuring that the governing Board has the expertise, policies, processes, and information necessary to oversee the school effectively during its next stage of growth. The ultimate goal is to maintain a governing Board that operates transparently, exercises appropriate fiduciary and academic oversight, holds leadership accountable, and consistently makes decisions in the best interests of Empower's students, families, employees, and the public.

(e) Describe and explain any desired changes to the staffing structure. This includes changes to school leadership, support personnel, and teaching staff. Attach a revised staffing chart.

As Empower Schools of Alabama continues to grow, the staffing structure will evolve to support increased enrollment, a two-campus K–8 model, expanded academic programming, and greater organizational self-sufficiency. The primary goal is not simply to add positions, but to develop a sustainable staffing model in which responsibilities are clearly defined, instructional resources remain concentrated as close to students as possible, and staffing growth is aligned with enrollment and available revenue.

Empower anticipates changes across three primary areas: school-based leadership and instructional staffing, specialized student and academic supports, and central office/business operations.

Empower will maintain a leadership structure that provides dedicated administrative leadership at both the Lower and Upper Campuses. Each campus will continue to be led by a principal responsible for academic achievement, school culture, personnel management, family engagement, and daily campus operations.

As enrollment increases, Empower will evaluate the need for additional school-based administrative support, including assistant principals, deans, or other leadership positions. These positions will not be added solely based on organizational growth but will be considered based on student enrollment, staff-to-administrator ratios, student support needs, and the operational complexity of each campus.

The long-term objective is to ensure that principals are able to remain focused on instructional leadership and student achievement rather than having their capacity consumed primarily by operational responsibilities.

Teaching staff will increase incrementally as enrollment grows. Empower's long-term facilities strategy contemplates the potential to serve approximately 900 students across grades K–8. Reaching that enrollment level would require additional classroom sections and corresponding increases in certified teaching staff.

Rather than adding all anticipated positions in advance, Empower will use a phased staffing model tied directly to confirmed enrollment. Additional teachers will be hired as new classroom sections are required and financially sustainable.

Particular attention will continue to be given to recruiting and retaining highly qualified educators in areas that are traditionally difficult to staff, including mathematics, science, exceptional education, multilingual learner services, and other specialized areas.

The revised school-day schedule, competitive compensation, professional development opportunities, leadership support, and positive organizational culture will remain important components of Empower's strategy for attracting and retaining high-quality educators.

Empower intends to maintain and strengthen its investment in instructional support personnel. As the organization implements Amplify ELA in grades K–5, Curriculum Associates mathematics in grades

K–5, and A+ College Ready in grades 6–8, instructional coaching and professional development will be important to ensuring that these resources are implemented with fidelity.

Empower will continue utilizing instructional coaches and specialized academic support personnel to strengthen Tier I instruction while also supporting intervention and acceleration.

As enrollment and student needs increase, Empower will evaluate the need for additional:

- Instructional coaches;
- Reading and mathematics interventionists;
- ARI and literacy support personnel;
- Numeracy support;
- Exceptional education teachers and paraprofessionals;
- English Learner and gifted education personnel; and
- Academic support staff responsible for assessment, data analysis, and school improvement.

The goal is to ensure that staffing decisions support both strong core instruction and a comprehensive Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).

As enrollment grows, Empower anticipates a corresponding increase in the number and range of students requiring specialized services. Staffing for exceptional education, English Learners, gifted education, counseling, mental health, behavioral support, and related services will therefore be reviewed annually.

Where student enrollment and service needs justify full-time internal positions, Empower will consider bringing additional specialized services in-house. Contracted providers may continue to be used when specialized expertise is required or when the number of students requiring a particular service does not financially justify a full-time position.

This approach allows Empower to balance access to high-quality services with responsible financial stewardship.

Empower will continue prioritizing mental health and student support as part of its whole-child model. The organization currently maintains leadership and personnel dedicated to mental health and student services, including counseling, social work, behavioral support, and related services.

As enrollment approaches the organization's long-term capacity, additional student support personnel may be necessary to maintain appropriate service levels across both campuses. Staffing decisions will be informed by student need, caseloads, attendance and behavior data, mental health referrals, and available funding.

One of the most significant anticipated staffing changes during the renewal period will be the continued development of Empower's internal business and financial operations capacity.

As Empower works toward reducing and ultimately eliminating its reliance on New Schools for Alabama for comprehensive back-office support, the organization will evaluate positions necessary to internally manage accounting, bookkeeping, payroll, accounts payable and receivable, budgeting, financial reporting, grant accounting, federal programs fiscal management, procurement, and audit preparation.

This transition will occur gradually. Empower will first determine which functions can be responsibly absorbed by existing personnel and which require additional expertise. New positions will be added only when the cost and organizational benefit support transitioning the function internally.

The ultimate goal is to develop a business office capable of independently managing Empower's routine financial operations while continuing to utilize external auditors, legal counsel, financial advisors, or specialized consultants when appropriate.

The 2026–2027 school year represents a significant shift in Empower's operational staffing model because the organization has brought both transportation and the Child Nutrition Program in-house.

With the elimination of STS as Empower's transportation provider, the organization now directly manages transportation personnel necessary to operate three daily routes and maintain its four-bus fleet. The staffing structure will include drivers and appropriate personnel responsible for transportation coordination, routing, vehicle maintenance, safety, and compliance. As enrollment and transportation demand increase, additional drivers or routes may be added.

Similarly, the transition from SLA to a self-operated Child Nutrition Program requires Empower to maintain sufficient internal CNP staffing to manage meal preparation and service, procurement, inventory, compliance, reporting, and financial sustainability.

These positions represent an intentional shift from paying external organizations to perform essential services toward building operational expertise and capacity within Empower.

As Empower grows, the central office structure will continue to be evaluated to ensure that it remains appropriately sized relative to the number of students and schools served. Central office growth will be strategic and limited to positions that provide clear organizational value or allow Empower to eliminate or reduce more costly contracted services.

The organization will seek to avoid creating an unnecessarily large administrative structure. Whenever possible, positions will be designed with clearly defined responsibilities and accountability measures, and opportunities to consolidate related functions will be considered.

This approach aligns with Empower's goal of directing the greatest possible percentage of available resources toward classrooms, instructional personnel, student services, and programs that directly benefit students.

The proposed facilities expansion and long-term goal of serving approximately 900 K–8 students will require a corresponding multi-year workforce plan. Empower will develop staffing projections alongside enrollment and facilities projections rather than treating these decisions independently.

As new classroom capacity becomes available, staffing will be added in phases based on:

Enrollment ' Classroom Sections ' Teaching Positions ' Student Support Needs ' Leadership/Operational Capacity

This sequence will help prevent the organization from adding recurring personnel expenses before sufficient recurring revenue exists to sustain them.

Empower's desired staffing changes reflect the organization's transition from a developing charter school into a more mature and increasingly self-sufficient K–8 school system. During the renewal period, staffing will increasingly support three organizational priorities: academic excellence, operational independence, and sustainable growth.

The organization does not anticipate making significant staffing changes simply to expand the organizational chart. Instead, staffing decisions will be driven by demonstrated student needs, enrollment, academic priorities, regulatory requirements, operational responsibilities, and available recurring revenue.

As Empower grows, the organization will continue asking whether each new or redesigned position improves instruction, strengthens services to students and families, increases organizational capac-

ity, or produces operational or financial efficiencies. This disciplined approach will allow Empower to build the staffing infrastructure necessary to serve a larger student population while protecting the financial sustainability and student-centered culture of the organization.

Documents upload – supporting documentation	File name:	Proposed Staffing Chart - Charter Renewal.pdf
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(f)Describe and explain any desired changes to facilities. This includes new locations and expansions. Provide a timeline for desired expansion and supporting documentation if applicable.

As Empower Schools of Alabama continues to grow, access to adequate, permanent, and appropriately designed facilities will be essential to the organization’s long-term sustainability and its ability to meet the needs of students and families. Our current facilities have allowed Empower to expand its K–8 program and serve a growing number of students; however, space limitations increasingly affect our ability to expand enrollment, provide specialized academic programming, and offer a comprehensive range of extracurricular and enrichment opportunities.

Over the next charter term, Empower desires to explore two primary options for long-term facilities expansion. The preferred long-term option is to identify, acquire, renovate, and/or construct a permanent school facility within the Bessemer City limits that can ultimately support Empower’s full K–8 program. A permanent facility would provide greater stability for the organization while allowing the school to intentionally design academic, extracurricular, athletic, arts, intervention, student support, and community spaces around the needs of its students.

As an alternative or interim expansion strategy, Empower will explore the feasibility of adding additional permanent or modular classroom units to the Upper Campus. This expansion could provide the additional instructional capacity needed while the organization evaluates and secures a longer-term permanent facility solution. Any expansion of the Upper Campus would be carefully evaluated based on available property, infrastructure, zoning, safety, traffic flow, utilities, financing, and the ability to provide adequate common and extracurricular spaces in addition to classrooms.

The long-term facilities goal is to establish sufficient capacity to serve up to approximately 900 students across grades K–8. Reaching this capacity would allow Empower to increase the number of students served within each grade band while maintaining an instructional environment that supports small-group instruction, intervention, enrichment, special education, mental health services, and other student supports.

Importantly, Empower’s facilities needs extend beyond simply adding classrooms. Our current space supports limited extracurricular programming and restricts our ability to provide students with the full range of experiences we believe should be part of a high-quality K–8 education. Future facilities planning will therefore prioritize dedicated or flexible spaces for athletics, fine arts, music, performing arts, clubs, student activities, intervention, counseling and mental health services, staff collaboration, family engagement, and other enrichment opportunities. Additional multipurpose, recreational, and outdoor spaces will also be considered as part of the long-term facilities strategy.

Proposed Expansion Timeline

Years 1–2: Planning, Feasibility, and Immediate Capacity Needs
Empower will assess current and projected enrollment, determine the maximum sustainable capacity of both existing campuses, and evaluate opportunities for additional modular units at the Upper Campus. During this period, the organization will also begin identifying potential properties and

development opportunities within the Bessemer City limits and evaluating financing, acquisition, renovation, and construction options. Immediate facility improvements or modular additions may be pursued as enrollment requires and resources permit.

Years 2–3: Site Selection and Expansion Decision

Based on enrollment trends, financial capacity, available properties, and feasibility studies, Empower will determine whether the most appropriate path is expansion of the existing Upper Campus, acquisition and renovation of an existing facility, construction of a new permanent facility, or a combination of these approaches. This phase would include site selection, preliminary design, financing, zoning and regulatory approvals, and development of a detailed implementation plan.

Years 3–5: Development and Implementation

Empower would move toward construction, renovation, acquisition, and/or installation of additional facilities. Expansion would occur in phases when appropriate so that student capacity can grow responsibly while protecting the organization's financial stability and maintaining high-quality academic programming.

Long-Term Goal: Capacity for Approximately 900 K–8 Students

The ultimate objective is to establish a sustainable facilities footprint within Bessemer that can accommodate approximately 900 students in grades K–8 and provide the academic, extracurricular, athletic, enrichment, and student-support spaces necessary for a comprehensive educational program.

This facilities expansion represents a critical investment in Empower's future. Demand for enrollment cannot be addressed responsibly without corresponding investments in physical capacity. Likewise, increasing enrollment without expanding extracurricular and student-support spaces would limit Empower's ability to provide the well-rounded educational experience envisioned for its students. Therefore, facilities planning will remain closely connected to enrollment projections, academic programming, financial sustainability, and the organization's long-term strategic plan.

Ultimately, Empower's goal is not simply to create space for more students, but to develop a permanent educational environment in Bessemer where students have the space and resources to learn, grow, participate, compete, create, and thrive.

(g)Describe and explain any desired changes to business services. This includes changes to food services or back-office support (bookkeeping, budgeting, federal programs, etc.).

As Empower Schools of Alabama continues to grow and mature as an organization, a key strategic priority is to increase our internal capacity to manage essential business, financial, and operational functions. Empower's long-term goal is to become increasingly self-sufficient in the management of services that directly impact students, staff, and the organization's financial sustainability.

The 2026–2027 school year represents a significant milestone in this transition toward greater operational independence. Beginning with the 2026–2027 school year, Empower ended its business relationships with SLA for Child Nutrition Program (CNP) services and STS for school transportation services.

Rather than continuing to outsource these essential functions, Empower has invested in the infrastructure, personnel, and systems necessary to manage these programs internally.

For the 2026–2027 school year, Empower transitioned its student transportation program from STS to an internally managed transportation model. As part of this transition, Empower purchased four school buses, providing the organization with the capacity to operate three daily transportation routes while maintaining one spare bus.

The spare bus provides important operational flexibility by allowing Empower to respond to mechanical issues, maintenance needs, field trips, extracurricular activities, and other organizational transportation needs without immediately relying on an outside transportation provider.

Bringing transportation in-house also gives Empower greater oversight of routing, scheduling, driver expectations, student safety, maintenance, transportation costs, and overall service quality. As enrollment and facilities expand, Empower will continue evaluating transportation needs and determining whether additional buses, routes, drivers, or transportation infrastructure are necessary.

Empower also ended its relationship with SLA for Child Nutrition Program services and transitioned to a self-operated Child Nutrition Program beginning with the 2026–2027 school year.

Bringing the CNP in-house allows Empower to directly manage all aspects of the program, including staffing, menu planning, food procurement, budgeting, inventory, compliance, meal participation, financial management, and the overall quality of the student dining experience. This transition provides Empower with greater control over both programmatic and financial decisions while creating opportunities to develop a CNP that more directly responds to the needs of our students.

Most importantly, the goal is to create a sustainable Child Nutrition Program that is operationally efficient, financially responsible, compliant with state and federal requirements, and capable of adapting as Empower's student population grows. Empower will continue monitoring food and labor costs, participation rates, procurement practices, reimbursement revenue, and program performance to ensure the long-term sustainability of the program.

The successful transition of transportation and child nutrition services represents an important step in Empower's broader strategy of developing the internal capacity to manage critical organizational functions.

Building upon these operational changes, Empower also desires to explore the feasibility of bringing its remaining back-office business functions in-house, ultimately reducing and potentially eliminating the need for comprehensive back-office support from New Schools for Alabama (NSFA).

NSFA has provided valuable support during Empower's development and growth, particularly in areas related to financial management and other back-office functions. As Empower enters its next phase of organizational maturity, however, we recognize the importance of developing the personnel, systems, expertise, and institutional knowledge necessary to independently manage these responsibilities.

The transition would be intentional and phased. Empower will evaluate its readiness to assume greater responsibility for functions including bookkeeping and accounting, accounts payable and receivable, budgeting and forecasting, financial reporting, cash-flow management, grant accounting, federal programs fiscal management, procurement, audit preparation, internal controls, and state and federal financial reporting.

Bringing these functions in-house could provide Empower with greater day-to-day visibility into its financial position, improve the timeliness of financial information, strengthen alignment between financial decisions and organizational priorities, and increase accountability at the organizational level. It would also allow Empower to build institutional knowledge that remains within the organization as leadership, programs, enrollment, and facilities continue to grow.

At the same time, Empower recognizes that greater independence must be accompanied by strong financial controls and appropriate oversight. Before transitioning significant financial responsibilities internally, Empower will ensure that qualified personnel, appropriate financial management systems,

documented policies and procedures, segregation of duties, Board oversight, and independent external audit processes are firmly established.

Proposed Transition Timeline

2026–2027: Operational Independence and Capacity Building

Empower has transitioned transportation and Child Nutrition Program services in-house, ending its relationships with STS and SLA for these services. During this period, Empower will focus on successfully operating these programs, monitoring their financial sustainability, strengthening internal systems, and documenting processes. The organization will also evaluate current back-office functions and determine the staffing and systems necessary for additional services to transition internally.

Years 2–3: Expanded Internal Business Operations

Empower will begin transitioning selected back-office functions internally as organizational capacity permits. During this phase, NSFA may continue supporting higher-risk or specialized financial functions while Empower strengthens internal expertise, financial controls, reporting systems, and staffing.

Years 3–5: Increased Financial and Operational Self-Sufficiency

As internal capacity is demonstrated, Empower will continue transitioning appropriate remaining functions with the goal of becoming substantially or fully self-sufficient in routine business and financial operations.

Long-Term Goal: Organizational Self-Sufficiency

Empower's long-term goal is to eliminate the need for comprehensive back-office support from NSFA while retaining the flexibility to contract with qualified external professionals for specialized accounting, audit, legal, financial advisory, or compliance services when those services are beneficial to the organization.

The timing of this transition will ultimately be based on organizational readiness, financial feasibility, and the ability to maintain strong internal controls. Empower will not transition a service internally solely for the purpose of eliminating an external provider. Each decision will be evaluated based on whether Empower can provide the service with equal or greater quality, efficiency, accountability, compliance, and financial stewardship.

The changes initiated during the 2026–2027 school year demonstrate Empower's continued evolution from a developing charter school organization into a more mature, sustainable, and self-sufficient school system. By strategically investing in transportation, child nutrition, and eventually internal business operations, Empower is building the infrastructure necessary to support continued enrollment growth while ensuring that more organizational decisions and resources remain closely aligned with the needs of our students, families, and schools.

(h)Describe and explain any desired changes to education service providers. This section is optional.

As part of the charter renewal process, Empower Schools of Alabama has reviewed its use of external education and operational service providers to determine whether the current structure remains appropriate for the organization's next stage of development. Empower is not proposing significant changes to providers that directly deliver the school's core instructional program. Instead, the primary desired changes involve continuing to build internal organizational capacity and reducing reliance on outsourced operational functions when those services can be provided more effectively, responsively, and economically in-house.

Empower's approach is based on the principle that outsourcing can be valuable when a provider offers specialized expertise or capacity that the school does not yet possess internally. However, as Empower has grown from a start-up charter school into a two-campus K–8 organization, leadership has determined that certain functions are better positioned under the school's direct management.

One of the primary areas identified for potential change is Empower's relationship with New Schools for Alabama, which currently provides back-office and business support services. This partnership has provided important financial, accounting, reporting, budgeting, and charter-school operational expertise during Empower's development.

During the renewal period, Empower desires to gradually build the internal capacity necessary to bring appropriate back-office functions in-house. The purpose of this transition is to increase direct organizational control, improve responsiveness, strengthen institutional knowledge, and create clearer accountability for day-to-day financial processes.

Any transition will be deliberate rather than immediate. Empower recognizes that financial reporting, payroll coordination, accounts payable and receivable, budgeting, state reporting, federal programs, audit preparation, and other business functions are critical operations that cannot be disrupted. New Schools for Alabama will therefore continue supporting Empower until the organization has established sufficient staffing, systems, procedures, and internal controls to assume the applicable responsibilities successfully.

The desired change should consequently be understood as a planned capacity-building strategy rather than dissatisfaction with the existing provider.

Empower currently utilizes Technology Lab for substantive technology-support services. At this time, Empower does not anticipate eliminating this relationship. Technology Lab provides specialized technical expertise and infrastructure support that remains valuable as Empower operates technology systems across two campuses.

The school will continue evaluating the scope of the contract annually to ensure that services remain cost-effective and responsive to organizational needs. Empower may develop additional internal technology capacity over the renewal term, particularly for routine school-level support, technology inventory, instructional technology coordination, and immediate troubleshooting. However, specialized infrastructure and technical services may continue to be outsourced where doing so is operationally and financially advantageous.

A significant change to Empower's service-provider model has already occurred with the Child Nutrition Program. Empower has transitioned CNP operations from an outsourced model to direct school operation.

Bringing CNP in-house provides Empower with greater control over meal quality, portions, staffing, scheduling, regulatory compliance, purchasing, responsiveness to student needs, and the overall dining experience. It also provides leadership with greater visibility into program costs and performance.

During the renewal term, Empower intends to continue developing its internal CNP capacity rather than returning to a fully outsourced food-service model, provided that direct operation continues to be financially sustainable and compliant with applicable requirements.

Empower has similarly transitioned student transportation from an outsourced service to an in-house operation. The school has developed its own transportation capacity, including acquiring buses and establishing internal oversight of routes and transportation operations.

This change provides greater control over route planning, student safety, communication with families, service reliability, and responses to transportation concerns. Transportation is particularly

important to Empower because reliable access to school directly affects attendance and continued enrollment.

The school will continue using outside vendors for specialized transportation-related services when appropriate, such as maintenance, inspections, repairs, or other functions requiring specialized expertise. However, the core transportation program is intended to remain under Empower's direct management.

Empower does not desire to eliminate its partnerships with outside mental-health providers. Instead, the school intends to strengthen these relationships and increase students' access to services on campus.

Empower partners with outside therapy providers that are able to provide services within the school setting. This model is particularly valuable because students can receive needed therapeutic services without routinely missing significant instructional time, and families are not required to leave work or travel to outside appointments whenever school-based service delivery is appropriate.

These providers supplement rather than replace Empower's internal mental-health and student-services structures. During the renewal period, the school intends to continue evaluating partnerships based on student need, provider quality, accessibility, confidentiality requirements, family choice, and the effectiveness of services.

Empower also anticipates continuing to utilize external academic partners when they provide specialized expertise that strengthens the instructional program. Partnerships supporting areas such as instructional coaching, curriculum implementation, literacy, numeracy, assessment, professional development, and advanced middle-school coursework may continue when they provide services or expertise that would not be efficient to replicate internally.

These relationships will be evaluated based on their connection to the revised Performance Framework and measurable student outcomes. As Empower strengthens internal instructional leadership, external providers should increasingly function as capacity-building partners rather than creating long-term organizational dependence.

During the renewal period, Empower will evaluate education service providers using several considerations: the quality and effectiveness of services; cost compared with internal delivery; specialized expertise required; compliance requirements; responsiveness to students, families, and staff; organizational capacity to perform the function internally; and the extent to which the service contributes to academic, operational, or financial goals.

The governing Board will continue providing appropriate oversight of substantive contracts, while the Executive Director and administrative team will monitor provider performance and make recommendations regarding continuation, modification, competitive procurement, transition, or termination.

Overall, Empower's desired change is a movement toward greater internal organizational capacity while preserving strategic external partnerships where outsourcing continues to add value. Child Nutrition and transportation have already transitioned to direct operation. Back-office services represent the next major area where Empower intends to explore increased internal capacity.

Technology support is expected to remain a strategic outsourced service at this time, while mental-health and specialized academic partnerships will continue where they expand student access or provide expertise that strengthens the educational program.

This approach allows Empower to evolve from the external-support structure necessary during its start-up and rapid-growth years toward a more mature and self-sustaining organizational model,

while maintaining high-quality external partnerships in areas where specialized providers continue to offer clear educational, operational, or financial benefit.

(i) Describe and explain any desired changes to the school model that has not been queried in the sections above.

Empower Schools of Alabama is not proposing a fundamental change to its existing K–8 public charter school model, mission, or commitment to personalized learning during the renewal term. Rather, the desired changes represent the continued maturation of the model based on lessons learned during the initial charter period, enrollment growth, academic performance, student and family needs, and the operational realities of serving students across two campuses.

Many of the most significant changes—including enrollment growth, facilities, governance, education service providers, financial operations, and performance measures—are addressed elsewhere in the renewal application. Beyond those areas, Empower proposes several refinements intended to strengthen the student and employee experience and improve the school's ability to deliver consistently on its mission.

One desired change is a refinement of the length and structure of the school day. Empower's extended school-day model was initially intended to provide students with additional instructional time, intervention, enrichment, and opportunities to address unfinished learning. Experience during the current charter term, however, has demonstrated that the length of the school day can affect both student/family satisfaction and the recruitment and retention of effective educators.

During the renewal period, Empower desires greater flexibility to establish a school schedule that preserves sufficient instructional time while creating a more sustainable experience for students and employees. The proposed schedule would provide greater consistency between campuses while continuing to protect time for core instruction, intervention, enrichment, and professional learning.

This adjustment does not represent a reduction in Empower's commitment to accelerating student learning. Rather, the goal is to use instructional time more intentionally and effectively, recognizing that additional time alone does not guarantee stronger academic outcomes.

Empower also intends to strengthen its identity as a cohesive K–8 educational organization. As the school has grown and expanded to two campuses, the organization has had to develop systems that create continuity between elementary and middle grades.

During the renewal term, greater emphasis will be placed on vertical alignment of curriculum, instructional expectations, assessment practices, intervention systems, student culture, and transition planning. Students should experience Empower as one continuous educational program rather than two separate schools operating on different campuses.

Particular attention will be given to the transitions between elementary and middle school and between eighth and ninth grade. The goal is for students to leave Empower academically prepared, socially confident, and equipped to advocate for themselves as they enter high school.

Empower intends to retain personalized learning as a defining component of the school model while making its implementation more intentional, measurable, and connected to student outcomes.

The school's academic performance demonstrates the need for significant acceleration, particularly for students entering Empower with substantial unfinished learning. Enrollment growth has also resulted in changing student cohorts from year to year, including students arriving at multiple grade levels with severe academic deficits.

The renewed model will therefore place increased emphasis on MTSS, Power Hour, targeted intervention, small-group instruction, student goal setting, progress monitoring, data conferences, and individualized academic planning. Benchmark and formative assessment data will be used more systematically to identify students requiring intervention or enrichment and to evaluate whether instructional strategies are producing adequate growth.

This refinement also places greater responsibility on students to understand their own learning. Personalized learning should ultimately result in students being able to identify where they are academically, where they need to go, and what actions will help them reach their goals.

Mathematics will require particular attention during the renewal period. With SY2025–26 ACAP mathematics proficiency at 6.8%, strengthening mathematics instruction is one of Empower's most urgent academic priorities.

The school model will therefore include more deliberate mathematics intervention, stronger implementation of the adopted curriculum, instructional coaching, data analysis, small-group instruction, and targeted support for students with significant skill gaps. The objective is to ensure that mathematics improvement is embedded in the daily instructional model rather than addressed solely through test preparation or short-term interventions.

Empower also desires to continue developing a school model in which students have meaningful opportunities beyond core academic instruction. The House System will remain an important component of school culture, creating opportunities for belonging, leadership, teamwork, healthy competition, service, and relationships across grade levels.

Student enrichment will continue to be driven in part by student interests. Opportunities may include Robotics, golf, Anime, Pickleball, Video Gaming, Girls Inc. STEM, Chess, Pep Squad, Dance, Line Dancing, Board Games, Art, and Choir, along with other activities identified through student interest.

Athletics, including volleyball, basketball, and track, will continue to provide additional avenues for student engagement and belonging. The addition of band further expands opportunities for students interested in music and performing arts.

These experiences are not viewed as separate from the educational model. Student engagement, belonging, attendance, leadership, and connection to school can contribute directly to students' willingness and ability to persist academically.

Empower intends to further integrate social-emotional learning and mental-health services into the school model. The school recognizes that academic intervention alone may be insufficient when students are experiencing social, emotional, behavioral, family, or mental-health barriers.

Empower will continue using SEL data to understand student needs and evaluate students' sense of belonging and connection to school. Internal mental-health and student-services personnel will work alongside outside therapy partners that can provide services on campus when appropriate.

Providing access to therapy within the school setting helps reduce the amount of instructional time students may miss for outside appointments and reduces transportation and scheduling burdens for families. This structure supports Empower's broader objective of addressing barriers that may interfere with attendance, engagement, and academic success.

Attendance will also become more intentionally integrated into Empower's academic and student-support work. Chronic absenteeism cannot be treated solely as an administrative compliance matter because students who are not consistently present cannot fully benefit from intervention, personalized learning, enrichment, or other elements of the model.

Attendance data will therefore be considered alongside academic, behavioral, SEL, transportation, and family-support information. When attendance concerns emerge, the objective will be to identify the underlying barrier and provide appropriate intervention while maintaining clear expectations for families regarding compulsory attendance and truancy requirements.

Empower's mission emphasizes developing students who can advocate for themselves and their communities. During the renewal period, the school desires to make student voice and agency more visible throughout the educational model.

Students will increasingly participate in academic goal setting, data conversations, leadership opportunities, House activities, clubs, and decisions regarding enrichment opportunities. Student surveys and other feedback mechanisms will also provide information regarding belonging, school climate, engagement, and the overall student experience.

The intent is for students to become active participants in their education rather than simply recipients of instruction.

The changes proposed for the renewal period should be understood as refinements rather than a redesign of Empower Schools of Alabama. Empower intends to remain a K–8 public charter school centered on personalized learning, academic growth, family and community collaboration, and development of students as leaders and advocates.

The next phase of the model will place greater emphasis on measurable academic outcomes, intensive mathematics improvement, targeted intervention, student ownership of learning, attendance, SEL and mental-health supports, student belonging, enrichment, athletics, arts, and successful K–8 transitions.

At the same time, Empower will seek to create a more sustainable experience for employees and students by refining the school schedule and ensuring that organizational growth does not outpace the school's ability to deliver a high-quality educational program.

Ultimately, the desired evolution of the school model is from a rapidly growing start-up charter school into a stable, academically focused, student-centered K–8 educational organization. The lessons learned during the initial charter term provide Empower with an opportunity to retain the strongest elements of its original vision while becoming more intentional about how those elements are implemented, measured, and improved during the next five-year renewal period.

(j) Provide a comprehensive financial analysis of the costs associated with making the desired changes outlined above, and the revenue streams available to finance these changes. Attach a preliminary budget summary for the first year of the renewal period.

Empower Schools of Alabama has approached its proposed changes to facilities, business services, transportation, child nutrition, and academics with the expectation that organizational growth must be financially sustainable and aligned with enrollment growth. The proposed changes will require both short-term investments and long-term financial planning; however, several of the changes also create opportunities to reduce dependence on contracted services, improve operational efficiency, and redirect resources toward students and classrooms.

Empower enters the renewal period from a position of relative financial stability. For FY2025, Empower reported \$5,649,095 in actual General Fund revenue and \$5,427,799 in General Fund expenditures, resulting in a positive change in fund balance after other financing activity. The year-end General Fund balance was approximately \$1.386 million. In addition, actual federal and other Special Revenue Fund revenues totaled approximately \$1.134 million.

These resources provide an important foundation; however, Empower does not intend to rely on reserves to finance recurring expansion costs. Recurring expenses must ultimately be supported by recurring revenues, while reserves, grants, philanthropy, financing, and other nonrecurring sources should primarily support one-time investments and strategic capital needs.

Facilities represent the most significant potential financial investment during the renewal period. Empower desires to ultimately establish sufficient facilities within the Bessemer City limits to accommodate approximately 900 students in grades K–8, either through the acquisition, renovation, or construction of a permanent facility or through phased expansion of existing facilities, including the possibility of additional modular units at the Upper Campus.

The cost of this expansion cannot yet be precisely determined because it will depend on the selected property, construction market, financing terms, infrastructure requirements, and whether Empower pursues new construction, renovation, modular expansion, or a combination of these strategies. Therefore, the first year of the renewal period should focus primarily on feasibility, site evaluation, conceptual planning, financing options, and the development of a comprehensive facilities master plan rather than committing the operating budget to a major construction project.

Empower has previous experience managing significant capital investments. Its prior renovation project included approximately \$113,780 in architectural costs and \$405,449 in construction-related costs, demonstrating both the scale of facility investment and the importance of identifying sufficient capital resources before beginning future expansion.

Potential funding sources for future facilities expansion include:

- State and federal capital grants when available;
- Private and foundation grants;
- Capital campaign contributions and philanthropic gifts;
- Bank or other institutional financing;
- Public School Fund or other legally available financing mechanisms;
- Lease-to-own arrangements;
- Partnerships with community and philanthropic organizations;
- Organizational reserves designated by the Board for capital purposes; and
- Future operating surpluses generated through enrollment growth.

Empower's strategic plan already identifies a multi-year capital campaign and increased corporate and foundation partnerships as strategies for financing facilities expansion. It also calls for 10–12 targeted grant applications annually as part of a broader revenue diversification strategy.

A major facility acquisition or construction project should therefore be maintained as a separate capital project budget rather than absorbed into the regular instructional operating budget.

A significant operational investment has already occurred for the 2026–2027 school year. Empower ended its transportation relationship with STS and purchased four school buses, allowing the organization to operate three daily routes while maintaining one spare bus.

The transition creates new direct costs for driver salaries and benefits, fuel, insurance, maintenance and repairs, inspections, licensing, training, routing, and eventual vehicle replacement. However, these costs replace a significant portion of the contracted transportation expense previously paid to an outside provider.

The financial advantage of the internal model is that Empower is investing in organizational assets and internal capacity rather than relying entirely on an outside vendor. The fourth bus also provides operational redundancy and can support field trips, extracurricular activities, and other organizational needs.

Transportation costs should be reviewed annually on a total-cost-per-student and cost-per-route basis to ensure that the internal model remains financially advantageous.

Beginning in 2026–2027, Empower also ended its relationship with SLA and transitioned to a self-operated Child Nutrition Program.

The transition requires Empower to directly assume responsibility for CNP personnel, food and supplies, equipment, kitchen operations, training, compliance, inventory, procurement, and financial management. However, the transition also eliminates the management costs associated with outsourcing the program and gives Empower greater control over purchasing, staffing, menus, participation, and cost containment.

The principal revenue sources supporting CNP will include federal meal reimbursements, state or federal CNP funding where applicable, meal-related revenues, and other allowable program revenues.

The financial goal is for the CNP to become a sustainable program whose recurring operating expenses are substantially supported through program-generated and restricted CNP revenues, minimizing reliance on unrestricted General Fund resources.

The academic changes contemplated during the renewal period are comparatively manageable within Empower's operating budget because they primarily involve curriculum, professional development, instructional materials, assessments, and implementation support rather than significant new physical infrastructure.

The primary changes include:

Amplify ELA – Grades K–5: Funding will be required for curriculum licenses and/or materials, teacher resources, professional development, and replacement materials.

Curriculum Associates Mathematics – Grades K–5: Empower will incur curriculum and instructional material costs, including digital resources, student materials, professional learning, and related assessment resources.

A+ College Ready – Grades 6–8: Empower will continue investing in rigorous middle-grades programming and professional development through A+ College Ready for students in grades 6–8. Empower is currently participating in ALSDE A+ College Ready Cohort 19, a three-year grant-funded initiative that significantly reduces the costs associated with curriculum implementation, instructional resources, and professional development during the grant period.

This funding allows Empower to strengthen academic rigor and build teacher capacity while minimizing the immediate financial impact on the organization.

As the grant period concludes, Empower anticipates assuming the ongoing costs associated with sustaining the A+ College Ready curriculum beginning in Year 3 of the charter renewal period. These future costs will be incorporated into the organization's multi-year financial planning to ensure the program remains sustainable beyond the grant-funded implementation period.

These academic investments can be supported through a combination of General Fund instructional allocations and allowable federal, state, and grant funding. Federal programs may support eligible professional development, intervention, instructional materials, supplemental academic programming, and services for qualifying student populations.

Empower's academic strategy also emphasizes the use of ACAP, iReady, DIBELS, and Benchmark data, specialized instructional staff, intervention, and implementation of the Alabama Literacy and Numeracy Acts. Accordingly, curriculum expenditures should be viewed as part of a larger investment in a coherent instructional system rather than as isolated textbook purchases.

The proposed school-day adjustments are not expected to create significant new expenditures. Instead, the revised schedule is intended to provide sufficient instructional time while improving Empower's competitiveness in recruiting and retaining highly qualified educators. The schedule will be:

Campus	Monday–Thursday	Friday
Lower Campus	8:15 AM–3:15 PM	8:15 AM–1:15 PM
Upper Campus	8:00 AM–3:30 PM	8:00 AM–1:30 PM

The Friday early-release schedule also provides protected time for professional development, collaborative planning, data analysis, lesson internalization, and instructional improvement. Because these activities can occur within the regular employee work structure, Empower can provide sustained professional learning without relying as heavily on additional stipends, substitute teachers, or after-hours professional development.

During the renewal period, Empower also intends to evaluate the gradual transition of back-office financial services currently supported by New Schools for Alabama to an internally operated business office.

This transition may initially increase personnel and technology expenses because Empower must ensure adequate staffing, financial management systems, payroll capacity, bookkeeping expertise, federal programs knowledge, internal controls, and professional development. The current organizational structure already includes Finance/Payroll and a Director of Business and Facilities Operations, providing a foundation upon which additional internal capacity can be developed.

Over time, however, these expenses would replace rather than simply supplement external back-office costs.

The transition should occur only when Empower can demonstrate that internal operations will maintain or improve financial accuracy, segregation of duties, compliance, reporting, and audit readiness. This approach is consistent with Empower's strategic plan, which specifically identifies transitioning NSFA back-office support to an Empower-operated and sustained program while strengthening purchasing protocols, monthly reconciliations, and internal controls.

Empower anticipates financing the proposed changes through a diversified combination of revenue sources. The largest recurring source will remain state and local public education revenues generated by enrollment. As enrollment increases, additional recurring revenue should provide the primary source for staffing, instructional programs, transportation, facilities operations, and administrative infrastructure associated with growth.

Additional revenue sources will include federal formula and competitive funds; Child Nutrition Program reimbursements; state academic and program-specific allocations; federal program funds; competitive grants; foundation and corporate philanthropy; capital grants; fundraising and a potential capital campaign; financing for major facility projects; and Board-authorized reserves for appropriate one-time or strategic investments.

Empower's FY2025 results demonstrate the importance of maintaining diversified revenues. Actual General Fund revenue included approximately \$3.922 million in state revenue and \$1.647 million in local revenue, while Special Revenue Fund revenue included more than \$1.083 million in federal funding.

The organization will also continue pursuing grants and philanthropic partnerships to reduce the amount of unrestricted operating revenue required for strategic initiatives.

Empower will use several financial safeguards as it implements these changes. Most importantly, expansion will be phased according to actual enrollment rather than anticipated enrollment alone. New recurring positions and operating expenses should be added only when recurring revenue is sufficient to sustain them.

The organization will also seek to maintain positive annual operating margins and adequate cash reserves. Empower's strategic financial framework establishes targets of a 2% operating surplus and 40 days cash on hand in 2026, increasing to 55 days by 2028 and at least 65 days by 2030.

This approach will allow Empower to pursue growth without jeopardizing the financial stability of its existing academic program.

The following represents a planning-level preliminary budget for the first year of the renewal period. Because final state allocations, enrollment, federal awards, CNP reimbursements, staffing decisions, facility costs, and vendor pricing will not be known until the annual budgeting process is completed, the amounts below should be treated as preliminary planning ranges rather than final appropriations.

Revenue Category	Preliminary Planning Amount
State and Local Education Revenue	\$6,000,000–\$6,500,000
Federal/Special Revenue Programs	\$1,000,000–\$1,300,000
Child Nutrition Program Revenue/Reimbursements	\$500,000–\$700,000
Grants, Philanthropy & Other Revenue	\$200,000–\$500,000
Estimated Total Revenue	\$7,700,000–\$9,000,000

Expenditure Category	Preliminary Planning Amount
Instructional Personnel, Salaries & Benefits	\$3,600,000–\$4,100,000
Curriculum, Assessment, Intervention & Professional Development	\$350,000–\$500,000
Student Support/Special Programs	\$550,000–\$750,000
Child Nutrition Program	\$500,000–\$700,000
Transportation Operations	\$350,000–\$500,000
Facilities, Utilities, Maintenance & Existing Debt/Lease Obligations	\$800,000–\$1,000,000
Administration, Finance, Technology & Back-Office Operations	\$700,000–\$900,000
Insurance, Legal, Audit & Other Organizational Costs	\$250,000–\$350,000
Facility Expansion Planning/Predevelopment	\$100,000–\$200,000
Contingency/Reserve Contribution	\$150,000–\$250,000
Estimated Total Expenditures	\$7,350,000–\$9,250,000

The first year of the renewal period will emphasize stabilization and capacity building rather than immediate large-scale expansion. Priority investments will include successfully operating the new

internal transportation and Child Nutrition programs; implementing Amplify, Curriculum Associates, and A+ College Ready with fidelity; maintaining competitive compensation and staffing; strengthening internal finance and business operations; and completing the planning and feasibility work necessary for future facilities expansion.

Major facility construction or acquisition is not assumed within the operating budget above. Once a site and expansion strategy are selected, Empower will develop a separate capital budget identifying acquisition or construction costs, financing sources, debt-service requirements, grants, philanthropic commitments, and the impact on the organization's multi-year operating forecast.

The first-year budget will also be adjusted to actual enrollment before significant recurring expenditures are committed. This is particularly important because Empower's strategic plan calls for financial forecasting to be directly integrated with enrollment, staffing, and facility growth.

The proposed changes represent a strategic shift toward greater organizational ownership and long-term sustainability. The acquisition of buses, transition to a self-operated Child Nutrition Program, planned development of internal back-office capacity, adoption of aligned academic programs, and future facilities expansion will require substantial investment. At the same time, these changes reduce reliance on external vendors, build assets and institutional capacity within Empower, and provide greater control over the quality and cost of services.

Empower will therefore pursue growth in phases, matching recurring expenses to recurring revenues while using grants, philanthropy, financing, and other nonrecurring resources for capital and start-up investments. This approach is designed to ensure that expansion toward serving as many as 900 K–8 students does not compromise the financial stability or academic quality of the existing organization.

The preliminary budget will be updated annually as enrollment, state allocations, federal awards, CNP reimbursements, staffing costs, and facility plans become known. Empower's overarching financial commitment will remain the same: growth will occur only when the organization can demonstrate that it is academically necessary, operationally feasible, and financially sustainable.

Documents upload – preliminary budget	File name:	Charter Renewal Preliminary Budget.pdf
	Uploaded:	08/16/2026 03:43 PM
	Uploaded by:	Meredith Davis

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

D) Exhibits

1. Enrollment Projections

Status: Completed

Form Result

Enrollment Projections

Please attach enrollment targets by grade level over the renewal period. Include minimum and maximum bounds for enrollment.

Documents upload- Enrollment
Bounds & Targets

File name: Enrollment Projections.pdf
Uploaded: 08/25/2026 04:53 PM
Uploaded by: Meredith Davis

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

2. Audited Financials

Status: Completed

Form Result

Please attach the three most recently completed financial audits

Documents upload- Audit

File 1

File name: Empower Schools of Alabama FY 23 Audit.pdf
Uploaded: 07/06/2026 02:22 PM
Uploaded by: Meredith Davis

File 2

File name: 2024-09-GSAFAC-0000374112 (4).pdf
Uploaded: 07/06/2026 02:22 PM
Uploaded by: Meredith Davis

File 3

File name: Empower 9.30.2025 Financial Statements (2).pdf
Uploaded: 07/06/2026 02:22 PM
Uploaded by: Meredith Davis

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

3. Substantive Donations and Grants

Status: Completed

Form Result

Please attach a list of all substantive donations and grants over the contract term (\$20,000 or more in a fiscal year). Include the donor, amount, restrictions, fiscal year received, and time period if applicable.

File name:	Substantive Donations_2026-08-26 (1).pdf
Uploaded:	08/26/2026 01:27 PM
Uploaded by:	Meredith Davis

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

4. Substantive Loans and Lines-of-Credit

Status: Completed

Form Result

Please attach a list of all substantive loans and lines-of-credit over the contract term (\$50,000 or more in a fiscal year). Include the lender, amount, fiscal year received, and dedicated revenue streams for repayment.

File name:	ECS Substantive Loans and Lines of Credit (1).pdf
Uploaded:	08/17/2026 12:34 PM
Uploaded by:	Meredith Davis

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

5. Substantive Ongoing Contracts

Status: Completed

Form Result

Please attach a list of all substantive ongoing contracts over the contract term (\$50,000 or more in a fiscal year, continuing services). Include the vender, service, yearly amount, and date started.

File 1

File name: NSFA Service Agreement FINAL for EM-POWER 05.24.2022.docx.pdf
Uploaded: 07/20/2026 03:49 PM
Uploaded by: Meredith Davis

File 2

File name: Substantive Ongoing Contracts.pdf
Uploaded: 07/20/2026 03:49 PM
Uploaded by: Meredith Davis

File 3

File name: Substantive Ongoing Contracts.pdf
Uploaded: 08/17/2026 03:57 PM
Uploaded by: Meredith Davis

File 4

File name: Technology LabsEmpower Agreement.001062.v3.12.pdf
Uploaded: 08/17/2026 03:59 PM
Uploaded by: Meredith Davis

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

6. Alabama Continuous Improvement Plan

Status: Completed

Form Result

Please upload the most recent Alabama Continuous Improvement Plan

Documents upload – ACIP

File 1

File name: Empower ACIP 24-25 Strategy Map.pdf
Uploaded: 07/22/2026 04:30 PM
Uploaded by: Meredith Davis

File 2

File name: Empower ACIP 25-26 Strategy Map.pdf
Uploaded: 07/22/2026 04:30 PM
Uploaded by: Meredith Davis

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

7. Student Incident Reports

Status: Completed

Form Result

Please upload all SIR reports over the contract term for each location.

File 1

File name: SIR 22-23.xlsx
Uploaded: 07/06/2026 02:17 PM
Uploaded by: Meredith Davis

File 2

File name: SIR 23-24.xlsx
Uploaded: 07/06/2026 02:17 PM
Uploaded by: Meredith Davis

File 3

File name: SIR 24-25.xlsx
Uploaded: 07/06/2026 02:17 PM
Uploaded by: Meredith Davis

File 4

File name: SIR 25-26.xlsx
Uploaded: 07/06/2026 02:17 PM
Uploaded by: Meredith Davis

Element Review

Reviews is not provided

8. Compliance Monitoring Report

Status: Completed

Form Result

Please upload the most recent Alabama State Department of Education Compliance Monitoring

Documents upload – Compliance Monitoring Report

File 1:	LEA Accounting and Reporting
Uploaded by:	Meredith Davis
File 2:	for ALSDE Compliance Monitoring
File 3:	07/06/2026 07:06 PM
Uploaded by:	Meredith Davis
File 4:	2026-07-06-14-34-22-994.pdf
File 5:	07/06/2026 07:06 PM
Uploaded by:	Meredith Davis
File 6:	2026-07-06-14-34-30-713.pdf
File 7:	07/06/2026 07:06 PM
Uploaded by:	Meredith Davis
File 8:	2026-07-06-14-35-19-619.pdf
File 9:	07/06/2026 07:06 PM
Uploaded by:	Meredith Davis
File 10:	2026-07-06-14-35-26-776.pdf
File 11:	07/06/2026 07:06 PM
Uploaded by:	Meredith Davis
File 12:	2026-07-06-14-35-59-885.pdf
File 13:	07/06/2026 07:06 PM
Uploaded by:	Meredith Davis
File 14:	2026-07-06-14-36-35-839.pdf
File 15:	07/06/2026 07:06 PM
Uploaded by:	Meredith Davis
File 16:	2026-07-06-14-36-45-714.pdf
File 17:	07/06/2026 07:06 PM
Uploaded by:	Meredith Davis
File 18:	2026-07-06-15-05-53-447.pdf
File 19:	07/06/2026 07:06 PM
Uploaded by:	Meredith Davis
File 20:	2026-07-06-15-08-21-886.pdf
File 21:	07/06/2026 07:06 PM
Uploaded by:	Meredith Davis
File 22:	2026-07-06-15-07-02-932.pdf
File 23:	07/06/2026 07:06 PM
Uploaded by:	Meredith Davis
File 24:	2026-07-06-15-07-46-526.pdf
File 25:	07/06/2026 07:06 PM
Uploaded by:	Meredith Davis
File 26:	2026-07-06-15-08-01-589.pdf
File 27:	07/06/2026 07:06 PM
Uploaded by:	Meredith Davis
File 28:	2023-2024 2026-07-06-15-07-53-761.pdf

Element Review
Reviews is not provided

9. Accreditations

Status: Completed

Form Result

Please upload evidence of all current accreditations obtained by the school and its staff.

Documents upload – Active Ac-
creditations

File 1	
File name:	FINAL Empower Community School- Upper Campus 320585 AER Report (2).pdf
Uploaded:	07/06/2026 01:24 PM
Uploaded by:	Meredith Davis
File 2	
File name:	Cognia Email.pdf
Uploaded:	07/06/2026 01:24 PM
Uploaded by:	Meredith Davis
File 3	
File name:	doc00215120260825140541.pdf
Uploaded:	08/25/2026 03:31 PM
Uploaded by:	Meredith Davis

Element Review
Reviews is not provided