

COVID-19 Operations Written Report

Local Educational Agency (LEA) Name	Contact Name and Title	Email and Phone	Date of Adoption
Empower Charter School	Demi Brown, Executive Director	dbrown@empowercharter.org 858-292-1304	June 23, 2020

Descriptions provided should include sufficient detail yet be sufficiently succinct to promote a broader understanding of the changes your LEA has put in place. LEAs are strongly encouraged to provide descriptions that do not exceed 300 words.

Provide an overview explaining the changes to program offerings that the LEA has made in response to school closures to address the COVID-19 emergency and the major impacts of the closures on students and families.

Empower was able to move quickly to adapt to the sudden school closures in San Diego County, and on its last day of operation, every child went home with paper-based learning activities to last them for 15 days. Empower created a high-quality distance learning program, launched in two Phases as described below:

- **Phase 1 - Enrichment** (Days 1 - 15 of school closure): During Phase 1, teachers provided learners with enrichment activities, both non-technology and full technology-based, so that learners could continue to practice the skills they had been taught.
- **Phase 2 - Distance Learning** (Beyond 15 days of school closure): During Phase 2, teachers connected with learners and delivered instruction remotely via a Distance Learning program designed with four pillars at its core: high-quality learning plans for every child, small group learning to ensure equitable instruction, socio-emotional support, and robust support for parents as our partners in education.

The school district had meals in place immediately following the closure on March 16, 2020. Empower was able to inform its families about the meals program before we closed on March 13. Empower immediately surveyed families to determine their needs, including socio-emotional, economical, and technology needs. The Empower team was able to quickly pivot to meet the needs of its students, while also ensuring equitable access to a high-quality learning experience. The school had strong existing relationships in place with its families, and this proved to be invaluable to ensure open communication at all levels within our school community. Families knew they could contact the school for support, and we knew our families would inform us of any needs we did not anticipate as they arose. This sense of team strengthened our program offerings and ability to meet the needs of our community.

Provide a description of how the LEA is meeting the needs of its English learners, foster youth and low-income students.

Empower continued to offer Integrated and Designated English Language Development, aligned to the English Language Development Standards. Lessons delivered in the online format had ELD supports embedded, such as captions, text-to-speech, translation assistance, and use of visuals. Supplemental online programs were also offered to students to continue their language learning.

Empower's curricula was differentiated for students based on their instructional level. The technology department arranged for hotspots and devices for all students who needed one, especially to low-income and any foster-youth students. Empower tracked student participation and made phone calls to families on a weekly basis to offer assistance to any who did not participate. Often, families in these cases needed additional technical support, or an explanation of the programs, which we provided. The technology team created bilingual videos to educate families about the program and disseminated bilingual instructions/visual guides to families.

Empower also provided differentiated instruction through synchronous zoom sessions to ensure every child received the support they needed. Teachers held three zoom sessions each week, each with a different focus: 1) socio-emotional support 2) small group language arts instruction and 3) small group math instruction.

Empower sent weekly communications to parents with resources and offers of assistance to apply for programs targeted to support English learners, foster youth, and low-income students. Communications were sent via email and text in English and Spanish. The school office answered the phone between the hours of 9am-3pm, as this is a preferred communication method for families in need of assistance. The school's Family Liaison ensured that personalized support was provide to any families who qualify under the McKinney-Vento Act, as well as focal students and their families. Any families experiencing housing instability, homelessness, or other socioeconomic stresses and were provided with focused assistance as they experience difficulties with accessing online learning. Empower also held weekly bilingual Zoom sessions with parents called *Coffee with the Director* to share pertinent information, updates, and resources. These sessions were recorded and sent to families who could not attend in the moment.

Provide a description of the steps that have been taken by the LEA to continue delivering high-quality distance learning opportunities.

Empower's Distance Learning program was designed with four pillars at its core:

1) High-quality learning plans for every child

Academic plans were grounded in research-based practices, such as Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR). We trained our parents and every school staff member on GRR. Teachers curated and created interactive video lessons of the weekly standards. Most lessons and activities on the learning plans were delivered asynchronously so that families could access them according to their individual schedules. We knew that the pandemic found our families in a variety of circumstances – some continuing to work as essential workers and some with more time and capacity to facilitate their child's access to lessons. Our plans were tailored to meet a variety of these needs and ensure that whether the family only had a brief amount of time during the work day/weekend, or had several hours each day to devote – that there was a program in

place for their unique needs. The school also invested in the Achieve 3000 and Smarty Ants literacy program, a research-backed high-quality online program that ensured our students received differentiated instruction while also engaging in standards-based lessons.

2) small group learning to ensure equitable instruction

Every teacher offered three online zoom sessions during each week: one focused on socio-emotional supports, one focused on language arts, and one focused on mathematics instruction. These small groups allowed teachers to connect with students and continue to support their academic and socio-emotional needs.

3) Socio-emotional support

In addition to the weekly online session facilitated with a focus centered on socioemotional support, the school shared resources with parents to support their children. Important school events that were impacted due to the closure, such as the school talent show, Dia del Nino, and traditional end of year activities were transitioned to online/virtual formats. It was important to our school community to attempt some sense of normalcy, and continue our sense of community and connectedness during this time.

4) Robust support for parents as our partners in education.

Parents were provided the opportunity to interface with all staff members in real time, via phone, zoom, or email, depending on what the specific situation warranted. The school also continued to hold Student Success Team Meetings and 504 meetings as needed. The school's PTO continued virtually to plan events and supports for the school community.

Special education supports and services continued according to the needs of each Individual Education Plan (IEP), and the school continued to hold IEP meetings throughout its closure.

These four pillars were already values in place at our school, and we found ways to ensure this continuity in the virtual environment.

Educators engaged in two weeklong professional development sessions. In addition, our staff led ongoing weekly Tech Talks and shared model practices during weekly Professional Learning Communities (topics included: Flipgrid, Seesaw, Screencastify, Kahoot, Edupuzzle, PearDeck, Mentimeter). The professional development sessions included learning about best practices in delivering online teaching/learning, methods for creating engaging virtual lessons, Zoom, Google Suite for Education, and online programs such as Achieve 3000/Smarty Ants and ST Math. Additionally, all Empower educators participated in a weeklong course, *Teaching Online Essentials*, provided by University of California San Diego.

Teachers continued to receive coaching and feedback in the virtual environment. Lead teachers supported their peers by modeling lessons and online teaching practices.

Provide a description of the steps that have been taken by the LEA to provide school meals while maintaining social distancing practices.

Empower's food vendor is the local district, which provided meals to all students. Empower requested that the district, as its food vendor, provide vended meals to Empower so that the school could do its part to distribute meals to all children in the community. While this request was denied, Empower worked with the district to ensure meals were provided at its school site. The district expanded its operations to include the site. Empower also facilitated the partnership between the district and a local community center to expand meals distribution.

Provide a description of the steps that have been taken by the LEA to arrange for supervision of students during ordinary school hours.

Empower is located on a co-located district site. The district closed the site and the school was not provided regular access to the site, even for its own administrative functions.

Without a site to arrange supervision for students, Empower sent weekly communications to parents about existing organizations providing childcare and other community resources.