

Guidance Document on Empowerment Schools and the Empowerment School Application Process for the 2017-18 School Year

Office of College and Career Readiness

Rhode Island Department of Education

Release Date: March 3, 2017

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Table of Contents

Section 1	Introduction	3
Section 2	Empowerment Schools Proposal Submission & Approval Process	
	<i>Prior to Submitting an Empowerment School Proposal</i>	4
	<i>The Empowerment School Application Submission, Review, and Approval Process</i>	4
	<i>What Happens Next – After Approval and Registration as an Empowerment School</i>	6
Section 3	Empowerment School Accountability	9
Section 4	Empowerment School Proposal Documents	
	<i>Proposal Overview</i>	10
	<i>Cover Page</i>	11
	<i>Proposal Narrative</i>	12
	Appendix:	
	Appendix A: State Statutes Not Eligible for Waiver for Empowerment Schools	17
	Appendix B: Empowerment School Conversion Vote Process	19

Section 1: Introduction

About Empowerment Schools.

Leadership matters. Empowerment Schools build on the notion that the educators closest to students know their students' needs best – and that these educators are best positioned to lead innovative schools that help their students reach their full potential.

The 2016 General Assembly enacted the School and Family Empowerment Act specifically to help empower these educators. The Empowerment Act provides educators and community leaders the voluntary opportunity to reimagine and implement their vision for an excellent school by taking advantage of unprecedented levels of school-based autonomy and regulatory flexibility. These autonomies and flexibilities will enable educators to continuously improve instruction and implement and adopt innovative strategies that meet the needs of their students.

Rather than a “one-size-fits-all” approach, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) anticipates that each empowerment school will be unique, dynamically reflecting the needs of its students and vision of its educators. Empowerment Schools may vary both in terms of size – from an entire district or state school to a CTE program or a “micro-school” (a school-within-a-school) – and in terms of the levels of autonomy and flexibility afforded to the school. For example, some Empowerment Schools may choose to have complete academic, operational, and financial autonomy, while other Empowerment Schools may choose to only focus on enabling some of those autonomies. Some Empowerment Schools may request wide ranging flexibilities from state regulations across the board, while other Empowerment Schools may simply only want one flexibility from a single state regulation. However, at its core, any successful Empowerment School will possess effective leadership, collaborative site-based decision-making, and clearly defined autonomies between the school, district, and state.

Ultimately, Empowerment School proposals are locally developed and locally approved with little involvement from RIDE. Local districts and educators possess almost complete authority to design and authorize an empowerment school – including authorizing any flexibilities from state laws or regulations. Local school districts, not the state, make final decisions regarding whether or not an Empowerment School proposal is approved.

RIDE's primary roles for the application process are to design the application framework on the front-end and register approved empowerment applications on the back-end. RIDE may not prohibit an Empowerment School from seeking waivers from state statutes or regulations (beyond those specifically identified within the School and Family Empowerment Act). Once designated as an Empowerment School, RIDE will then work with districts to share best practices, foster a community of innovation among empowerment schools, and hold schools accountable for meeting performance expectations.

How to use this Guidance Document.

RIDE's *Guidance Document on Empowerment Schools and the 2016 Empowerment School Application Process* provides an overview on: 1) the responsibilities and steps for approving Empowerment School applications; 2) the steps for implementing an Empowerment School once approved (including accountability; and then finally, 3) actual documents and questions for the Empowerment School application. This guidance is applicable to local educators wishing to establish an Empowerment School, as well as district superintendents and school committee members.

The Rhode Island Department of Education is available to provide technical assistance to educators and districts with regard to all aspects of designing, approving, establishing, and overseeing an Empowerment School. Please do not hesitate to reach out to RIDE staff at empowerment@ride.ri.gov with any questions.

Section 2: Empowerment Schools - Proposal Submission and Approval Process

This section of the guidance document breaks down and provides details about the Empowerment School application and approval process into three distinct time periods:

- 1) Activities to consider prior to submitting an Empowerment School application to a school district
- 2) The actual Empowerment School application submission, review, and approval process
- 3) What happens next – after approval and registration as an Empowerment School

Details about Empowerment School accountability follow this section.

Prior to Submitting an Empowerment School Application

Activity	Description
Have questions?	If school leaders, educators, and/or district staff have any questions about the Empowerment School application process or requirements, please contact RIDE at empowerment@ride.ri.gov .
School Conversion Vote (Only Required for Existing Schools)	No existing public school may be converted into an Empowerment School (or back to a traditional school), unless two-thirds (2/3) of the full-time professional staff approve the submitted Empowerment School application. For existing schools seeking to be converted into an Empowerment School, the professional staff approval vote must occur <i>prior</i> to submitting the final application to the district for review. Evidence of a successful approval vote should be included in the application. Please see Appendix B: Empowerment School Conversion Vote Process for more information about the conversion vote process.
Optional Compliance Review	Prior to submitting to district staff, school leaders may optionally provide their application to RIDE staff for an optional, non-binding, compliance review. RIDE staff members are more than happy to review and confirm that the application is complete and complies with the application process and requirements. Please note – this determination has no binding validity on the actual approval of an Empowerment School application.

The Empowerment School Application Submission, Review, and Approval Process

Activity	Description
1) Application Submission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposed Empowerment School leader submits the signed application (with required attachments) to the district superintendent (or appointed designee). • Submission should include both an electronic copy and signed physical copy. • While applications may be submitted and reviewed on a rolling basis, the final deadline to submit a complete application for the 2017-18 school year is June 1, 2017.
2) District Staff Completeness Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upon receiving an Empowerment School application, district staff have 15 calendar days from the date of submission to review the application for completion.

Section 2: Empowerment Schools - Proposal Submission and Approval Process

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within 15 calendar days, district staff will need to send written notification to the school leader if the application is complete (all sections complete and all required documents attached), or if incomplete, explain what information is missing. • Applicants may resubmit the application with the missing information. If resubmitted, districts have 15 days to review the updated application for completion. However, all complete applications must be received no later than June 1, 2017.
<p>3) District Superintendent Quality Review and Decision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upon verifying a complete application, district staff must evaluate the quality of the Empowerment School application using a rubric and a transparent evaluation process. • Throughout the review process, districts may seek clarification or additional information from the applicant. This request for additional information may be through, but not limited to, written request and / or through a capacity interview with the school leader and members of the school leadership team. • Within 45 days of receiving the Empowerment School application (inclusive of the 15 day completeness review), the District Superintendent must either: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Approve the Empowerment application and transmit to the school committee for review. In transmitting the application to the school committee for review, the Superintendent should include written rationale for the approval decision; or, 2) Decline to approve the application and transmit the application back to the proposed Empowerment School leader. The written notification shall include specific written rationale for why the denial decision was made. • If the Superintendent determines to decline to approve the application, nothing precludes the applicant group from addressing concerns identified by the Superintendent and resubmitting an Empowerment application, as long as the complete application is received by June 1, 2017.
<p>4) District School Committee Review and Decision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the superintendent approves, the school committee has 45 calendar days to review the application and vote on one of the following decisions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Approve the Empowerment School application; 2) Deny the application; or, 3) Return to the district to further collaborate and work with the applicant for re-submission of an updated application to the school committee (with changes mutually agreed upon between the Empowerment school leader and superintendent) within 30 calendar days. • School committees shall provide both the superintendent and Empowerment school leader with written rationale for the committee's decision.
<p>Additional Submission Steps</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No more than 50 pages, single spaced, excluding appendices and attachments • Include page numbers, a table of contents, and footnotes for all references or citations • Submit two copies with signatures: 1 electronic PDF file and 1 original hard copy • Mail hard copies to Office of College & Career Readiness, Attn: Brian Darrow, Director of the Office of College and Career Readiness, Rhode Island Department of Education, 255 Westminster Street, Providence, RI, 02903 • Email files to empowerment@ride.ri.gov

Section 2: Empowerment Schools - Proposal Submission and Approval Process

What Happens Next – After Approval and Registration as an Empowerment School

Please note: as there’s no “one-size-fits-all” approach for Empowerment Schools, the activities identified below for an Empowerment School may vary or not be applicable based on the specific circumstances for each Empowerment School.

Activity	Description
RIDE Completeness Check and Registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once approved by the school committee, the superintendent should transmit an electronic copy of the application (including all required signatures), to empowerment@ride.ri.gov. • RIDE staff will verify that the Empowerment application for completeness, including and compliance with requirements in R.I.G.L. §16-3.2 • Once verified, the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education will officially registered the proposal as an Empowerment School and submit formal written notification of this designation to the Empowerment school leader and superintendent. • Upon registration of the Empowerment School designation by the Commissioner, the Commissioner shall be deemed to have authorized all necessary variances from statutes and regulations enumerated in the Empowerment School application. • This completeness check and registration should take no longer than 15 calendar days. <p>In order to facilitate statewide innovation, RIDE will publish approved Empowerment School plans to http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/Empowerment.aspx#3453130-statements-of-support</p>
RIDE Systems Pre-Opening	<p>RIDE recognizes that the establishment of the Empowerment School may result in changes to certain RIDE-specific systems/procedures (ex: data coding).</p> <p>Upon registration, RIDE will notify each Empowerment School and district of any required “pre-opening” tasks to ensure that the Empowerment School is efficiently set up within RIDE’s internal systems. If necessary, RIDE will appoint a “pre-opening liaison” from the Office of College and Career Readiness to serve as the key RIDE point person to help the school complete any required pre-opening tasks.</p>
Minimum Contracting Requirements	<p>Empowerment School legislation identifies two specific areas where a contract or written agreement is required between the Empowerment School and local school district:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowerment School Principal: serves at the pleasure of the superintendent with the advice and consent of the school committee through a written contract not to exceed three years. • Funding: If an Empowerment School opts not to be funded via §16-3.2-7 and §16-7.2-5, then the mechanics of how the Empowerment School will be funded should be identified through an alternative written agreement between the Empowerment School leader and the superintendent. <p>Please note – neither of these finalized contracts/agreements are requirements for the Empowerment School applications. However, both should be finalized prior to the beginning of the Authorized Empowerment Period.</p>

Section 2: Empowerment Schools - Proposal Submission and Approval Process

<p>Recommended Best Practice: Empowerment School Contract</p>	<p>While not required, one national best practice identified for autonomous public schools is the establishment of an “Empowerment School contract” between the Empowerment School and school district.</p> <p>This Empowerment School contract may include (but not be limited to) the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific performance expectations for the Empowerment School; • Identification of roles and responsibilities for the district and Empowerment School; • Identification of the Empowerment School’s academic, financial, and/or operational autonomies; • Variances from district policies; • Above minimum contracting requirements; and, • Process to review and approve major and minor amendments to the Empowerment School application. <p>Please contact RIDE at empowerment@ride.ri.gov if the authors would like technical assistance for creating an Empowerment School contract.</p>
<p>Amending an Empowerment School Plan</p>	<p>As Empowerment ultimately is about enabling educators with the tools they need to best serve their students’ needs, RIDE recognizes that educator’s needs may subsequently change as their students’ needs change.</p> <p>Empowerment Schools may submit requests to amend their Empowerment School application. Unless otherwise designated through an Empowerment School contract, Empowerment School application amendments should follow the approval sequence outlined in this application. The amendment does not need to be a full application – but rather, may be a detailed memo identifying the modification to the Empowerment application and rationale for the modification.</p> <p>The amendment must be approved by both the superintendent and school committee (and union, if it requires a school-specific amendment to the district-wide collective bargaining agreement) before being submitted to RIDE.</p> <p>Amendments to an Empowerment School application may not extend an Empowerment School’s authorized Empowerment period.</p>
<p>Approval of School-Based Amendments to a District-Wide Collective Bargaining Agreement</p>	<p><i>About Empowerment School-Based Amendments to Collective Bargaining Agreement:</i></p> <p>Although existing collective bargaining agreements shall apply to an Empowerment School, Empowerment Schools shall be eligible to amend the existing district-wide collective bargaining agreement through an expedited and timely process, subject to approval of the superintendent, district union membership, and school committee.</p> <p>School-based amendments to the district-wide collective bargaining agreement shall be non-precedent setting for future district bargaining or contract administration. In all instances, final approval or non-approval by all parties of school-based amendments to the district-wide collective bargaining agreement shall be made within ninety (90) days of submission of such request.</p> <p>School-based amendments may be designated to be in effect as long as a school is registered and designated by RIDE as an Empowerment School.</p>

Section 2: Empowerment Schools - Proposal Submission and Approval Process

Process for Considering Empowerment School-Based Amendments:

- Empowerment School applications, as part of the application narrative, should clearly identify which components of its application would require a school-based amendment to a district-wide collective bargaining agreement.
- Both the superintendent and school committee may approve an Empowerment School application prior to union approval of any school-based amendment to the district-wide collective bargaining agreement. Further, RIDE may also register the Empowerment School prior to union approval. However, no provision of the registered Empowerment School plan that requires a school-based amendment to the district-wide collective bargaining agreement will take effect until the school-based amendment is officially approved.
- Upon approval of an Empowerment Application by the school committee, the superintendent should transmit the approved Empowerment School plan to the district union president.
- Once received by the union president, final approval or non-approval by all parties of school based amendments to the districtwide collective bargaining agreement shall be made within ninety days.
- The superintendent should notify the Commissioner as to the determination of the proposed school-based amendment (either approved or non-approved).

Section 3: Empowerment Schools - Ongoing Accountability

Activity	Description
Authorized Empowerment Period	<p>Upon receiving the designation of an “Empowerment School”, all Empowerment Schools are initially authorized to operate for a period of up to three years. Unless otherwise stated in the Empowerment School application, the authorized period will last three years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The authorized three years will start on July 1 of the calendar year in which the school first proposes to operate as an Empowerment School and end on June 30 of the third school year (ex: for schools proposing to become an Empowerment School in the 2017-2018 school year, the authorized Empowerment period will last from July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2020). • All variances from state regulations and statutes will only be applicable to the school during the authorized Empowerment period.
RIDE Review of Empowerment Schools	<p>After the end of each school year, RIDE will review the performance of the Empowerment School according to: 1) RIDE’s accountability system; and, 2) the school-specific goals identified in the Empowerment School application.</p> <p>RIDE will codify this review in an annual report. A copy of RIDE’s annual review will be provided to the Empowerment School leader, superintendent, school committee, and the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education.</p> <p>As the report will look different for each Empowerment School based on the Empowerment School’s specific goals, RIDE will provide each Empowerment School leader and their superintendent with a template of their annual report as part of the pre-opening process.</p>
Renewal of Empowerment School Designation	<p>During the final school year of the authorized Empowerment period, an Empowerment School must re-submit an Empowerment School application using the same process outlined in this application. The newly submitted application may include new components, such as updated performance goals. The only exception: since an Empowerment School is already designated as such, a 2/3 teacher vote is not required to sustain Empowerment School status. The superintendent and school committee must approve the newly submitted application for the school to maintain its Empowerment School designation.</p> <p>Failure to re-submit an Empowerment application will result in the loss of the school’s Empowerment School designation at the end of the authorized Empowerment period.</p>
Revocation of Empowerment School Designation	<p><i>RIDE Revocation of Empowerment School Designation:</i></p> <p>Based on an evaluation of the Empowerment School's plan, its impact on student achievement, or its impact on the health and welfare of its students or staff, the Commissioner may, in extreme circumstances and at any time during the Empowerment School's authorized period of operation, recommend that the Empowerment School's designation and registration be revoked.</p> <p>Prior to recommending to the council that an Empowerment School's designation be revoked, the Commissioner shall provide the school, superintendent, and school committee with specific notice of the reasons for revocation and grant the school and school committee an opportunity to be heard in accordance with the process set forth in §16-39.</p> <p><i>Teacher Conversion Back to a Traditional Public School</i></p> <p>During the authorized Empowerment period, the full-time professional staff of the empowerment school may vote to convert the empowerment school back to a traditional public school. A conversion vote requires two-thirds of the full-time professional staff.</p>

Section 4: Empowerment School Proposal Documents

About the Empowerment School Proposal Documents:

Empowerment School proposals consist of multiple components – some required, some required only in particular circumstances, and some completely optional.

The table below breaks down all of the various components that local educators may include as part of an empowerment school proposal to their local school district.

Document	Required?	Notes
Application Cover Sheet	Yes	<p>The Empowerment School cover sheet needs to be signed by the following entities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowerment School Leader – with application submission • Superintendent – upon approval and transmission to the school committee. • School District board chair – upon approval from the school committee. <p>The cover sheet may be found on pg. 11.</p>
Application Narrative	Yes	<p>Should not exceed 50 pages, excluding the executive summary. The application narrative may be found on pg. 12.</p>
Affirmation of Two-Thirds Educator Conversion Vote	Depends	<p>Only required if converting an existing public school into an Empowerment School. Empowerment School leaders should still maintain actual voting documentation for records.</p> <p>The conversion voting process may be found in Appendix B.</p>
Application Budget	Depends	<p>Only required if the funding methodology and budgetary autonomy will be substantially different from how the school currently operate.</p> <p>A link to the Empowerment School budget may be found here.</p>
Application Narrative Appendices	No	<p>Empowerment School applications may include up to 30 pages of appendices attachments to support content frp, their application narrative.</p> <p>Appendix attachments may include, but not be limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A detailed listing of all district and state regulations from which the empowerment school is seeking a waiver; • Letters of community support.

Empowerment School Proposal: Cover Page

Proposed Empowerment School Overview

District of Proposed Empowerment School <i>(enter text on line above)</i>		
Name of Proposed Empowerment School Leader		
Phone	Email	
<i>If empowerment leader is different from current school principal, please explain above.</i>		
Name of Proposed Empowerment School		
Street Address of Proposed Empowerment School	City	Zip Code
What type of model will the school be utilizing?	<input type="checkbox"/> A school within a public school district	
	<input type="checkbox"/> A "micro-school" (school-within-a-school) in a public school district	
	<input type="checkbox"/> A CTE program within a public school district	
	<input type="checkbox"/> A state school	
<i>If the empowerment school will serve a different grade configuration or enrollment population, please explain above.</i>		

Signatories

Empowerment School Leader			
	Printed Name	Signature	Date
Empowerment School Principal, <i>if different from school leader</i>			
	Printed Name	Signature	Date
District Superintendent			
	Printed Name	Signature	Date
School District Board Chair			
	Printed Name	Signature	Date

Empowerment School Proposal: Proposal Narrative

This application recognizes that Empowerment Schools will not use a universal, one-size-fits-all approach. Rather, the Empowerment Act specifies potential autonomies that are available, and schools may ultimately tailor that which fits best for them. This could also include additional district or state regulation flexibilities. Ultimately, the format below allows applicants to select what autonomies believed to be most necessary while complying with the requirements of state law.

Section 1: Executive Summary

Provide an executive summary, no more than two pages in length, which summarizes the Empowerment School application. The executive summary should clearly describe why the authors want to become an Empowerment School and how the school and student experience will look different as a result of becoming an Empowerment School.

Section 2: Empowerment School Vision

- a) Provide the vision for the proposed Empowerment School. This vision should clearly lay out the coherent, big-picture aspirations that this school will seek to accomplish.
- b) Describe how becoming an Empowerment School will enable the authors to fulfill that vision, including, but not limited to, improving school performance and student achievement.

Section 3: Empowerment School Leadership Team

- a) Identify the specific members of the proposed school leadership team – including their name and role with the Empowerment School (ex: principal, educator, parent, community member). Note - if the authors know a specific role type that they would like serve on the school leadership team, but have not identified a specific person for that role, please still identify that role.
- b) Describe why the above members of the proposed school leadership team were selected. For leadership team roles that have been identified but do not have a specific person yet (ex: parent), please describe the process the Empowerment School will conduct to select a person to serve that role.
- c) Describe their respective roles and responsibilities of the school leadership team. Include specific details of how the school leadership team, in concert with professional staff of the Empowerment School, will govern and decisions regarding school policies and practices.
- d) Describe the relationship(s) between the Empowerment School leader, school leadership team, and district staff / superintendent.

Section 4: Empowerment School Goals

- a) Provide at least three goals that may be used to assess the progress of the students at the proposed Empowerment School. At least one goal should be based on academic outcomes related to the

Empowerment School Proposal: Proposal Narrative

current statewide accountability system. Goals should be specific, quantifiable, and measurable over the span of each year of an Empowerment School’s three year authorized period.

Below is a sample table that applicants may use to frame their goals – including target performance metrics for each school of the authorized Empowerment period, as well as a baseline benchmark of current performance.

Goal #1:			
Benchmark Current Performance:	Year 1 Target:	Year 2 Target:	Year 3 Target:
Goal #2:			
Benchmark Current Performance:	Year 1 Target:	Year 2 Target:	Year 3 Target:
Goal #3:			
Benchmark Current Performance:	Year 1 Target:	Year 2 Target:	Year 3 Target:

b) Describe how reaching the above goals will result in the Empowerment School achieving its vision.

Section 5: Empowerment School Autonomies – Teaching and Learning

Note: Empowerment Schools may possess a wide array of school-level autonomies relating to teaching and learning. Empowerment Schools may potentially choose to request multiple, only one, or even potentially none of these autonomies. Ultimately, the selection of which autonomies to request will be a local decision based on providing educators the tools they need to best address their student’s needs.

a) Please identify each of the teaching and learning school-level autonomies that the Empowerment School will possess, as it relates to teaching and learning:

Potential school level autonomies pertaining to instruction may include, but not be limited to:

- Curriculum
- Instructional practices
- Professional Development
- School level policies and procedures (e.g., school culture, student discipline, etc.)
- Courses of study, promotion, and graduation
- School calendar, schedule, and length of day
- Comprehensive assessment system
- Other: District level teaching & learning policies (please identify)
- Other: State level teaching & learning policies (please identify)

Empowerment School Proposal: Proposal Narrative

Potential school level autonomies pertaining to staffing, consistent with the district collective bargaining agreement and school-based amendments, may include, but not be limited to:

- Hiring teachers, professional staff, and other personnel employed at the school
- Assigning all teachers, professional staff, and other personnel employed at the school
- Terminating any personnel assigned to the school
- Approval of transfers of personnel to the empowerment school
- Teacher certification requirements – including teachers certified in subjects other than their assignment or teaching in a shortage area
- Other: District level teaching & learning policies (please identify)
- Other: State level teaching & learning policies (please identify)

b) For each identified autonomy selected above, please describe:

- Why this autonomy was selected? How will this autonomy enable the Empowerment School to reach its goals and achieve its vision?
- What will this autonomy look like in practice at the Empowerment School?
- What challenges will the Empowerment School face when implementing this autonomy, and what steps will the Empowerment School take to overcome those challenges?
- *If the autonomy will require a school-based amendment to a district-wide collective bargaining agreement* – Please identify the specific language within the collective bargaining agreement that will need to be amended.
- *If the autonomy will require a waiver of state statute or regulations (beyond those identified in Appendix A)* – Please identify the specific statute and / or regulation language for which a waiver is being requested.

Section 6: Empowerment School Autonomies – Finance and Operations

Note: Empowerment Schools may possess a wide array of school-level autonomies relating to school finances and operations. Empowerment Schools may potentially choose to request multiple, only one, or even potentially none of these autonomies. Ultimately, the selection of which autonomies to request will be a local decision based on providing educators the tools they need to best address their student’s needs.

a) Empowerment Schools may have wide latitude of how they are funded. Please identify the proposed funding methodology for the Empowerment School and describe why this methodology was selected. For reference, RIDE has described some potential funding options below.

Potential Options	Description
Complete Direct Funding	Empowerment Schools receive local, state, and federal funding directly to the school (in accordance with §16-3.2-7 and 16-7.2-5) as if they were their own school district (similar to state schools or charter schools).
Some Direct Funding*	Empowerment Schools receive only some specifically named funding [from those identified in §16-3.2-5(b) (ex: federal grants)] directly to the school. The remaining funding is allocated by the district to the Empowerment School in a manner similar to how the school was funded prior to becoming an Empowerment School.

Empowerment School Proposal: Proposal Narrative

Maintain Current Funding Structure*	Empowerment Schools maintain their current funding structure by having all funds allocated by the district to the Empowerment School in a manner similar to how the school was funded prior to becoming an Empowerment School.
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**The Empowerment Schools funding structure must be codified in mutually, written agreement between the Empowerment School leader and the superintendent. While the terms of the funding structure need to be described in the application, the actual written agreement does not need to be executed until after final approval of the Empowerment School application.*

- b) Empowerment Schools similarly have wide latitude of the type of autonomy they may possess regarding their budget. Please describe the level of budgetary autonomy that the Empowerment School will have. For reference, RIDE has described some potential budgetary autonomy options below:

Potential Options	Description
Complete Budgetary Autonomy	The Empowerment School leader and school leadership team have complete autonomy over the design and use of the Empowerment School budget. Autonomy includes the ability to directly select and contract for specific services (ex: food, transportation). Empowerment Schools may negotiate and contract directly with the school districts or third party vendors, consistent with applicable laws.
Some Budgetary Autonomy	The Empowerment School leader and school leadership team work with the district to create a budget for the school. The Empowerment School leader and leadership team have some autonomy over specific sections within the created budget. The Empowerment School may choose to contract directly with third party vendors for some services previously provided by the district, consistent with applicable laws.
Limited to No Budgetary Autonomy	The Empowerment School maintains budget autonomy and procurement of services directly with the district in a manner similar to how the school operated prior to becoming an Empowerment School.

- c) If the funding methodology and budgetary autonomy will be substantially different from how the school currently operates, then please:
- Complete Appendix C: Empowerment School Three-Year Budget Spreadsheet and include the spreadsheet as an attachment to the application.
 - Include a budget narrative that provides an overview of the budget and explains how the proposed funding methodology and budget autonomy are reflected within the budget.
 - Describe what safeguards and procedures the Empowerment School and district will use to ensure proper fiscal oversight over the Empowerment School's budget.

Empowerment School Proposal: Proposal Narrative

d) If the Empowerment School's budgetary autonomy enables them to at least directly contract for educational services:

- Identify the specific services in which the Empowerment School will contract for. Potential contracting services may include (but not be limited to):
 - Transportation
 - Food Services
 - Educational Resources (ex: curriculum, professional Development)
 - Custodial and Maintenance
 - School Resources (ex: media, libraries, nursing, and warehousing)
 - Other (please identify)
- Describe why these services were selected and how having autonomy over these services will enable the Empowerment School to reach its goals and achieve its vision.
- Describe the process the Empowerment School will use to determine and negotiate which vendor to contract with (district or third party).
- Describe the challenges the Empowerment School will face when implementing contracting autonomy and the steps the Empowerment School will take to overcome those challenges.
- If contracting for any of these services will require a school-based amendment to a district-wide collective bargaining agreement, please identify the specific language within the collective bargaining agreement that will need to be amended.

e) Please identify any additional fiscal or operational autonomies that the Empowerment School will possess. For each fiscal and operational autonomy, please identify:

- Why this autonomy was selected? How will this autonomy enable the Empowerment School to reach its goals and achieve its vision?
- What will this autonomy look like in practice at the Empowerment School?
- What challenges will the Empowerment School face when implementing this autonomy, and what steps will the Empowerment School take to overcome those challenges?
- *If the autonomy will require a school-based amendment to a district-wide collective bargaining agreement* – Please identify the specific language within the collective bargaining agreement that will need to be amended.
- *If the autonomy will require a waiver of state statute or regulations (beyond those identified in Appendix A)* – Please identify the specific statute and / or regulations for which a waiver is being requested.

Appendix A: State Statutes Not Eligible for Waiver for Empowerment Schools

Empowerment Schools provide school leaders and districts unprecedented levels of regulatory flexibility to design the school that they feel will best address their students' needs. Once approved at the local level, the Commissioner's registration of the proposal as an Empowerment School automatically authorizes all of the requested flexibilities outlined in the proposal.

As part of their proposal, Empowerment Schools may request flexibilities from any state statute and regulation except for federal funding and state statutes identified below, consistent with the district's collective bargaining agreement.

Portions of Title 16 (State Statute) Applicable to Empowerment Schools:

School calendars and attendance requirements

Section 16-2-2 (minimum length of school year);

Section 16-19-1 (compulsory attendance);

Section 16-20-1 (school holidays enumerated);

Healthy and safety

Section 16-2-17 (right to a safe school);

Sections 16-21-3 and 16-21-4 (fire safety);

Sections 16-21-10, 16-21-14, and 16-21-16 (health screenings);

Section 16-38-2 (immunizations);

Section 16-21-21.1 (Penalties for drug, alcohol or weapons offenses);

Federal mandates and funding

Section 16-22-9 (uniform testing);

Section 16-8-10 (federal funds for school lunch);

Teacher certification

Although waivers for §16-11-1 (teacher certification) are permissible, teachers must still hold a certification, though it may differ from their assignment, unless such teacher is assigned to teach in a shortage area, whereby the teacher shall be provided with school-based support and work toward a certification to be awarded within five years of the date of assignment at the empowerment school.

Teacher protections

Section 16-12-10 (immunity for report of suspected substance abuse);

Section 16-13-2, 16-13-3 (teachers' tenure)

Section 16-16-2 (teachers' retirement);

RIDE procedures and dispute resolution

Section 16-3.2 (empowerment schools);

Section 16-38-10 (power of officials to visit schools);

Section 16-39-1 (appeal of matters of dispute to commissioner);

Section 16-39-2 (appeal of school committee actions to commissioner);

Section 16-39-3 (appeal to state board);

Section 16-39-3.1 (enforcement of final decision);

Section 16-39-3.2 (interim protective orders);

Appendix A: State Statutes Not Eligible for Waiver for Empowerment Schools

Section 16-39-8 (subpoena power of commissioner);

Section 16-40-16 (student records);

Section 16-71-1 (Educational Record Bill of Rights Act);

Professionalism

Section 16-12-3 (duty to cultivate principles of morality);

Section 16-38-6 (commercial activities prohibited);

Section 16-38-9 (misconduct of school officers);

Equity and Access

Section 16-24-2 (regulations of state board pertaining to children with disabilities);

Section 16-38-1 (discrimination because of race or age);

Section 16-38-1.1 (discrimination because of sex);

Section 16-38-4 (exclusive clubs);

Chapter 21.5 of title 16 (Student interrogation)

Appendix B: Empowerment School Conversion Voting Process

All staff votes for converting a school into an Empowerment School should be transparent, fair, and should accurately represent the opinion of school staff.

To this end, the Department has developed the following model process that districts may assign to all groups interested in Empowerment. The model process respects the fact that every community is different and that local groups should be empowered to customize the process in a way that works for their community, assuming it meets the basic criteria for a fair and open process.

Model Standards for All Conversion Processes

Voters free from intimidation, harassment, and other forms of interference:

Votes should not take place in a public space where individual voters are not given the privacy to vote their conscience, but an independent third party should be able to monitor the process so as to ensure its overall integrity.

Unbiased voting process:

- the date of the vote should be approved by the district and publicized
- the voting process should be managed by an applicant-appointed, district-approved third party
- process management includes the counting of votes

Anonymity:

Ballots must be secret.

Process transparency:

The union is allowed to observe the process.

Steps to Conducting a Process

The conversion process to become an Empowerment School must be initiated by the primary author of the Empowerment application. Schools interested in Empowerment should reach out to empowerment@ride.ri.gov regarding how they propose to run the process in accord with the requirements in the law and the standards listed above.

1. The district approves each proposed plan for running the process and supervises its implementation. Votes conducted without district approval will not count toward the conversion process.
2. The district is tasked with assessing the validity of any challenge to the process.

Process Timeline

The timeline should ensure that all parties receive adequate notification before a vote.

Date	Event
Three weeks before vote	School notified the district of proposed vote date and third party
Two weeks before vote	District approves vote date and the third party
One week before vote	Voters notified of vote date
Vote date*	Staff vote

**Vote should occur at least one day prior to the Empowerment Application deadline.*

Absentee Voting

The absentee voting process should meet all three standards described above. On voting day, after all votes have

Appendix B: Empowerment School Conversion Voting Process

been collected but before any votes have been counted, absentee votes should be mixed randomly into the pool of votes.

Lodging Complaints About the Voting Process

Any complaints filed should take the form of a letter emailed to the primary contact listed on the district's website within one week of the vote. The letter should identify at least one of the three standards that has been violated or one of the following legal requirements, as described on the voting form:

- No person shall forge the signature of another or sign the ballot using a false name.
- No person shall damage, destroy, or alter a ballot that a non-profit is attempting to circulate or a faculty or a staff member is attempting to sign.
- No person shall harass, threaten, deceive, or intimidate faculty or staff members related to signing a ballot.
- No person shall offer or give anything of value to a faculty or a staff member in exchange for signing or not signing the ballot.

The burden is on the complainant to provide evidence that one of the four criteria or one of the four legal requirements has been violated. All complaints will be evaluated by the district. If a complaint is found to be valid and the violation could have been reasonably expected to change the outcome of the vote, the district will have the authority to nullify the results of the initial vote and authorize a new vote at the school, even if it is in the same school year.