



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
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## **Empowerment Schools FAQ**

### **General Questions**

#### **What is an Empowerment School and how is it different from other schools in the city?**

Empowerment Schools are schools at which principals have greater autonomy in exchange for agreeing to take on greater responsibility for producing results in terms of student academic achievement. While Empowerment Schools will be different in terms of accountability, goal setting, and autonomy—and will have different support structures than other schools—they are not dissimilar from other schools. Like most public schools in the City, these schools accept students who fall into their zones. They take all students, including English Language Learners and Special Education students. And, like all New York City public schools, they must follow City, State, and federal standards.

#### **Why are you expanding this initiative?**

Empowerment Schools will build on the record of success demonstrated by schools in the “autonomy zone” pilot program, which was launched in the 2004-2005 school year. The Department of Education is expanding this initiative because of principal satisfaction, demand from other schools to participate, and the strong results achieved by schools in the pilot program.

#### **What’s the record of schools in the “autonomy zone” pilot program, the first phase of the Empowerment Schools initiative?**

Autonomy zone pilot schools outperformed citywide averages in their first year 2004-2005, as well as their own past performance prior to entering the zone. Twenty-two of the 26 participating schools met their performance targets (85%).

#### **Will Empowerment Schools represent a major break from the past—when the Chancellor and the Mayor created 10 regions?**

No, this is an evolution. At first, the Mayor and the Chancellor had to stabilize the school system. Now that the system is stable, the Department of Education is ready to devolve power and decision-making to schools—an important part of the Children First vision from the beginning.

#### **What does this mean for the recently-created regional structure?**

There will still be 10 regions next year. They will continue to support the vast majority of New York City public schools.

#### **How will the DOE ensure that Empowerment Schools are serving all students, including high needs populations?**

There will be no differentiated enrollment policies for the empowerment schools. Schools will admit students in the same way as the regions.

## **Parent Questions**

### **Are principals required to consult with parents before signing the Performance Agreement by the June 19 deadline?**

Principals are required to consult with parents. This can be done through school leadership teams, parent associations, or separate meetings with parents or their representatives.

### **How will the Empowerment Schools impact Community Education Councils?**

Community district schools designated as Empowerment Schools will remain part of their community districts, and parents from those schools will be eligible to serve on Community Education Councils. The powers and duties of Community Education Councils will be unchanged.

### **Are Empowerment Schools required to have PTAs or PAs?**

Yes.

### **Will Empowerment Schools continue to have Parent Coordinators?**

Yes.

### **What do parents do if they take issue with something Empowerment School principals are doing?**

Parents can continue to go to the CEC for assistance. Plus, network support leaders and their teams will be responsive to parent concerns. And, as always, parents will be able to go to parent support offices, the Office of Parent Engagement for support. Or, they can call 311.

### **What if principals do not consult with parents or disagree with parents on the decision to move forward to become an Empowerment School? Is there any recourse for parents?**

Principals have a week, from June 12 through June 19, to consult with their school communities (teachers, staffs, parents) before signing the Performance Agreement. While parents must be consulted, this is ultimately the principal's decision. This mirrors the decision-making process in place in all New York City public schools.

### **Do CECs retain zoning powers over Empowerment Schools if lines need to be changed?**

Yes.

### **Can an Empowerment School be forced to accept overflow students from other schools within their district?**

Yes. Empowerment Schools will accept students the same way as schools throughout the City. There will be no differentiated enrollment policies for the empowerment schools.

## **Applications and Invitations**

### **How many schools applied to become Empowerment Schools?**

A total of 353 schools expressed interest in becoming Empowerment Schools.

### **How many schools were selected?**

A total of 331 schools were invited to become Empowerment Schools.

### **How were schools selected and who decided?**

Members of the Chancellor's senior leadership team reviewed the applications. Admission was based on a number of factors, including past performance, attendance, compliance data, and principals' responses to questions about how they would benefit from additional autonomy and accountability.

**How geographically diverse is the pool of invited schools?**

Schools invited to become Empowerment Schools represent every borough and every region. Specifically

<b>Borough</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of Pool</b>
Brooklyn	85	26%
Bronx	108	33%
Manhattan	99	30%
Queens	38	11%
Staten Island	1	0%
Pool	331	100%

<b>Region</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of Pool</b>
R1	52	16%
R2	46	14%
R3	20	6%
R4	15	5%
R5	15	5%
R6	29	9%
R7	9	3%
R8	34	10%
R9	63	19%
R10	44	13%
D75	1	0%
D79	3	1%
Pool	331	100%

**How diverse is the pool of invited schools in terms of grade level?**

Schools invited to become Empowerment Schools come from every grade level, with particularly strong representation at the elementary and high school levels. Specifically:

<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of Pool</b>
Elementary	91	27%
K-8	5	2%
Middle	53	16%
K-12	2	1%
Secondary	39	12%
High	140	42%
Special Education	1	0%
Pool	331	100%

## **Next Steps**

### **What happens now that these schools have been invited?**

Principals have a week, from June 12 through June 19, to consult with their school communities (teachers, staffs, parents) and decide whether or not they will accept the invitation to become Empowerment Schools. If they accept, they must sign a Performance Agreement. In the summer of 2006, principals will set individualized targets for student progress with the office of the chief accountability officer (Jim Liebman). At the end of each school year, schools will be assessed and graded on the basis of whether they were able to meet these targets. This June, schools will choose teams, or "networks," with up to 20 other schools. These networks will select "network support leaders," which will serve and help the schools. The new structure will be up and running by September, when school opens for the 2006-2007 school year.

### **What is a Performance Agreement?**

The performance agreement is a standard document that must be signed by all schools that want to be Empowerment Schools. It is in effect from the 2006-2007 school year through the 2009-2010 school year. It lists their autonomies, their responsibilities, expectations regarding student achievement, and rewards and consequences for meeting or not meeting these expectations.

### **What new powers will Empowerment Schools have?**

Empowerment School principals have authority to make decisions on:

- **Educational programming**
  - Professional development
  - Implementation of the core curriculum or ability to propose an alternative curriculum for approval by the DOE
  - Implementation of the DOE interim assessment system or option to propose an alternative for approval by the DOE
  - Summer and extended day programming
  - School schedule
  - Instructional support for providing services to ELL and Special Education students
  - Interventions
  - New teacher mentoring
- **Resource management**
  - Additional discretionary funding of \$150,000 a school, on average
  - Additional newly unrestricted funding of about \$100,000 a school
  - Increased transaction limit on procurement (up to \$5,000 from \$2,500)
  - The ability to buy services from vendors not contracted with the City up to \$25,000
- **Staffing management**
  - The ability to select and evaluate network support team leader
  - The ability to evaluate network support team members
- **Administrative exemptions**
  - Many DOE reporting requirements
  - Attending DOE meetings or events
  - Petitioning Empowerment Schools CEO for waivers from some Chancellor's regulations
- **Affiliation**
  - The ability to network with up to 20 schools with common educational focus
- **Support**
  - The ability to choose their network support team leader
  - The ability to elect to reward members of this team with cash bonuses

**What are the schools accountable for?**

- Achievement: They are held accountable for results. They are held accountable with grades based on whether they meet their targets. They are also assessed with Quality Reviews. Empowerment Schools that receive a grade of “C” for fewer than three years will have been deemed to have met their responsibilities.
- Safety: Schools are accountable for providing a safe and secure learning environment
- Enrollment: Schools are responsible for enrolling students consistent with DOE policies (taking children with all learning needs, including special education students and English language learners).
- Fiscal Integrity: Schools must demonstrate fiscal integrity
- Rules, Laws, Regulations: Schools must comply with all laws, regulations, and policies

**What are some of the rewards and consequences?**

Schools that receive an A on their progress reports and a +(well developed) or ✓ (proficient) on their quality reviews will be eligible for rewards and recognitions, including extra funding. Schools that receive a grade of D or F on their progress report or a grade of C in three consecutive years are subject to consequences (interventions, leadership changes, school closure).

**How long is the term of the agreement?**

This is a four-year agreement.

**What are the risks to principals who sign?**

In the worst circumstances, where schools do not evidence either progress or capacity to make progress over time, leadership changes will be made; and ultimately, schools may be closed.

**Is the new performance agreement different from the one that existed in the autonomy zone pilot program?**

Yes. The Empowerment School performance agreement is a value-added school assessment, evaluating schools on the basis of both their own past performance and the performance of a like-populated cohort of schools.

**Can principals back out if they decide that being an Empowerment School is not for them?**

The terms of the performance agreement can be amended annually. Principals who wish to opt out can petition the CEO of Empowerment Schools between July 1 and July 15 each year.

**If a principal leaves the school does the principal's decision to sign and become an Empowerment School still hold when there is a new school leader?**

Yes, unless the new principal chooses to opt out.

**What's the structure of the support system?**

In general, schools are at the top of the new Empowerment School hierarchy and all organizational structures exist to service schools. Each group of 20 schools has a small network support team. Also serving all empowerment schools is an integrated service center, which administers operations, suspension support, special education, legal issues, compliance, and the market.

**How will the teams of schools be determined? By geography? By school level?**

Schools will be able to choose their own networks. Networks need not be based on location, but they could be. Principals could unite because they have similar thoughts about education or because they cater to certain populations or age levels of students.

**Where will the Empowerment School offices, in particular the offices of each team, be located?**

Offices will be located throughout the City.

**If regions no longer have oversight over these schools, who or what is supervising these schools?**

These schools will be supported by the Empowerment Schools network support teams. The CEO of Empowerment Schools and the Department of Education's Chief Accountability Officer will also help ensure that the schools are complying with rules and regulations, meeting their performance targets, and receiving the support they require.

**Finances**

**How will the DOE finance Empowerment Schools?**

About \$50 million will be cut from the regional budgets. This amount is consistent with the cost of supporting the Empowerment Schools if they remained in the regions. Additionally, about \$30 million will be cut from central budgets. Some of this money will flow into a new, leaner "bureaucracy" to support Empowerment Schools. The majority of these freed-up resources will go to Empowerment Schools themselves, to support school programming. The additional money in Empowerment School budgets will represent the value and cost of what these schools used to receive regionally or centrally. These dollars were spent on behalf of the schools. Now they will be spent by the schools on the services that the schools need most to support their students.

**Where is the money going?**

About \$49 million is going to empowerment schools, about \$15 million is going to accountability and leadership development, and about \$16 million is going to form the Empowerment School support system.

**How many people will lose jobs in the regional bureaucracy to free up resources?**

About 350 overall. Most of the money saved will be sent to schools, where it will be spent on student programming and the educators who interact directly with children.

**How much extra budgetary discretion will Empowerment School principals receive?**

Empowerment Schools will receive varying amounts of additional money, depending on the size of their student bodies. Schools will receive a base of \$75,000 in new discretionary funding, plus extra money depending on the number of students. An average Empowerment School will receive an additional \$150,000 in new discretionary funding and will have access to an additional \$100,000 in newly unrestricted funds, which were previously tied to specific programs and positions.