

Part I: Cover Page – Organization Information

Organization Information	
Organization Name:	Empower Schools New or <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continuation Submission
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Organization Category (select all that apply)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Charter Network, Charter Management Organization or Charter School
<input type="checkbox"/>	Turnaround Leader Development Provider Management Partner
<input type="checkbox"/>	Stakeholder Engagement Specialist
Preferred Geographical Region(s) in Colorado to Work In (select all that apply)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Metro Denver Front Range (Colorado Springs, Ft. Collins) Rural / Mountain / Western Slope

Indicate the school district(s) or BOCES your organization is willing and able to engage with:

We are open to working across the state in any district.

Narrative Responses

a. Provide an update on your organization's work and progress since the original RFI submission in 2018.

Nationally, Empower has served as the key design and launch partner for a zone in St. Louis, MO, South Bend, IN, and four zones throughout Texas. In order to do this, we support communities at every step in the process of designing and launching a Zone to empower educators and transform educational opportunities for students. This work involves building relationships with school boards, mayors, superintendents, community groups, civic leaders, parents, principals and teachers, central office staff, and others who care about education. Each partnership is tailored to the community's local context, with different considerations regarding school funding, talent pipelines, support partner organizations, history, interest in innovation, and leadership capacity for change.

Empower Schools serves as a partner throughout the design, launch, and initial operations of Zones, with a greater investment of time in the early stages of design and launch, transitioning to an advisory role over time. Empower Schools plays many roles throughout the process, including:

- Strategy & Cultivation: Partnering with local champions to set the vision and strategy for a Zone and facilitating community buy-in
- Project management: Managing the project timeline toward key deliverables (e.g., Zone contracts, school board votes, critical staff hiring, etc.)
- Change management: Working closely with the district and zone leadership to ensure a smooth transition to the Zone structure
- Leadership onboarding: Support the recruitment and training of initial Board members and Zone leadership
- Partner and ecosystem development: Support the identification and recruitment of critical enabling partners to help support existing schools and educators as well as newly recruited leaders and operators
- Communications: Managing content and messaging around Zone design and launch
- Technical and legal support: Providing specific advice and support on Zone enabling contracts
- Talent pipelines: Helping to build a sufficient talent pipeline in conjunction with key partners

b. Describe any new work you have done or are doing in Colorado schools and districts since the original RFI submission in 2018.

Since 2018, the Northeast Denver Innovation Zone and Beacon Network Schools launched to utilize flexibilities, resources, and human capital to best serve all students within their schools. Empower was a key design partner in supporting school leaders in writing the application and MOU for the Zone, as well as developing the human resources, financial, and operational systems needed for the zone to function. In addition, Empower has supported all three Denver zones through an EdLead fellowship whereby the executive directors of each zone received targeted coaching and support in strategic planning and defining systems and procedures between the zone and district for enhancing school autonomy.

Capacity

a. Does your organization currently have the capacity to serve additional schools and districts in Colorado? If yes, indicate how many new schools or districts your current capacity would allow for. If no, explain what additional capacity you would need to put in place, and any other constraints such as timelines or minimum participating schools or districts.

Empower has the capacity to support additional districts throughout Colorado in the design and launch of Empowerment Zones. Depending on the number of districts interested at any time, our team can reallocate resources or hire new talent to support the work.

Evidence of Track Record of Improved Student and School Outcomes

a. Provide concrete evidence from your three most recent engagements with schools and districts (Colorado schools and districts are preferred, if available). Include a description of the criteria and the data that you use to determine the impact of your work. Highlight the context and location of where this work has occurred.

Springfield, Massachusetts

In Springfield, Empower partnered with the state education agency, the Springfield Public Schools, and the Springfield Education Association to help turn around ten struggling schools serving more than 5,000 students. All ten schools, now a part of the newly created Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership, were in the bottom four percent of all schools in Massachusetts.

All schools in SEZP receive significant autonomy over their budget, staffing, schedule, curriculum, and culture plans. Empower took the lead in designing the initial process through

which schools codified their academic models and also helped create a strong support structure for all schools within the Zone to ensure that they collaborate effectively and have access to high-quality coaching on how to be an effective autonomous leader.

Empower believes that some schools will thrive when given autonomy and show significant improvement. Other schools, however, will likely need more intensive interventions.

Interventions have included:

- The launch of a new program called the Founders Fellowship. Under this initiative, Empower facilitated the recruitment of two promising leaders who received in-depth training and design support in order to launch new school programs with one grade of students; both leaders are expanding their programs to serve an additional grade level of students next year.
- The turnaround of a large high school with new innovative programs that may include early college, Linked Learning, and other innovative efforts to provide more great schooling opportunities for students.
- Partnerships with key technical assistance partners to provide professional development and leadership coaching

Evidence of Progress:

- An SEZP school is the single most improved school from the bottom 10% in the state between 2015 and 2018
- In SY 17-18, three of the zone schools realized at least a 10-point improvement in math SGP and at least 15-point improvement in ELA SGP. All original zone schools improved in either ELA, math, or both
- SEZP schools have seen meaningful increases in other metrics, including behavior, attendance, satisfaction (parents, students), and more
- Increased teacher satisfaction and support: According to TNTP's insight survey, SEZP schools have improved overall from a 6.8 to an 7.6 on the Instructional Culture Index (ICI)

Denver, Colorado

Empower partnered with the Denver Public Schools and the Gates Family Foundation to launch the Luminary Learning Network (LLN), the first independently run innovation zone in Colorado. Empower worked closely with four schools and partners in Colorado to help ensure continued academic progress at these schools such that they remain great schooling options for students and become even more excellent. Valdez Elementary applied and was approved to join the Luminary Learning Network as they seek to enhance school-level autonomies. In addition, the Denver School Board selected Denver Green School to replicate and open a second middle school.

Evidence of Progress:

- The LLN Board initially set a three-year target goal for all Zone schools to exceed 70% on the Denver Public Schools' School Performance Framework (SPF) or move up one band in the SPF. Three out of four LLN schools met this zone-wide performance goal in the Zone's first year. In SY17-18, 2 out of 4 LLN schools exceeded 70% on the SPF and 1 other LLN school moved up a color band.

Waco, TX

Empower has worked closely with Transformation Waco as a zone design and implementation partner. Through this partnership, Empower and the Zone have collaborated to design and implement a Zone that aligns to the Waco Independent School District's broader goals, fits the local circumstances, and serves the community's needs.

Specifically, Empower has provided the following implementation supports in year 1:

- Provided direct and third-party expert supports to the Transformation Waco team in the design and execution of Spring Break Academies, the launch of the alternative certification program, and the adoption of high-quality teacher retention strategies
- Facilitated regular communication with the Texas state education department regarding grant parameters
- Facilitated the development of a strategic plan
- Supported the Zone Board in planning, content, and progress monitoring
- Supported the Transformation Waco team to identify operational needs and partner with expert providers, ensure compliance with state and nonprofit requirements, and develop clear organizational policies and procedures to guide finance and operations
- Provided support around topics of district partnership, school autonomy, performance contract clarification, applicable policy, and partner-oriented process mapping for new autonomous processes

Empower's experience and expertise is able to support Waco in taking advantage of the Zone partnership and set the conditions for school autonomy, support, and capacity building.

Evidence of progress:

- Three of the five zone schools experienced gains in reading and math in the first year of the zone's operation
- Brook Avenue Elementary, a Transformation Waco campus that had received the lowest rating on the state accountability system 5 years in a row before the launch of Transformation Waco, improved 20 points on the state accountability system in the Zone's first year, from an F to a C-rated campus, the highest-growth partnership campus in the state
- Developed a strong teacher pipeline is in place that will lead to higher-quality teaching for all students in the coming years

b. Self-assess the evidence base for the interventions your organization provides using the following Evidence-Based Intervention (EBI) tiers. Which EBI tier best describes your work, and why?

Self-Rating: Tier 2

In 2011, at the invitation of the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, Empower's founders were invited to support the design and launch of a turnaround effort for Lawrence's public schools through a state takeover. In Massachusetts, state takeover districts are managed by a receiver who is designated by the state to operate the district. This receiver holds all the powers of the superintendent and school committee. The receiver reports directly to the state's Commissioner of Education. In Lawrence, Empower Schools' founding team worked with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the district's new Receiver to develop a district-wide turnaround strategy focused on schools as the unit of improvement. As part of this effort, Empower Schools recruited the founding redesign team for the district and helped establish crucial partnerships with TNTP, Teach for America, ANet, Match Education, and a set of local and regional school operators including UP Education Network, Community Day, and Phoenix Charter Academy Network. Empower also supported in the negotiation of a new Collective Bargaining Agreement that allowed for flexible school level working conditions and a compensation model that provides stipends for expanded time and increased teacher leadership roles. In addition, this new contract created new top-level career ladder positions where high-quality teachers could be selected as Advanced or Master Teachers, earning up to \$85,000 per year without leaving the classroom.

CRPE describes the results of this effort in a November 2016 publication: "Between 2013 and 2014, the district instituted a number of changes: reduced spending in the central office, enhanced school autonomy, partnerships with charter operators to manage turnarounds, investments in teacher and principal pipelines, a new collective bargaining agreement that ended step-and-lane increases, and expanded learning time. The district worked collaboratively with the teachers' union on the new contract and the union has managed the turnaround of at least one of Lawrence's low-performing schools. Because of the collaborative approach, the turnaround effort has faced little opposition." Over five years, Lawrence experienced an increase in the share of Level 1 seats, the top level of the state accountability system, from 8% in 2012 to 42% in 2016.

A 2016 NBER Working Paper studied the impact of the interventions used in the takeover using a quasi-experimental approach. This study found that "LPS students exposed to the first two years of the state's takeover score 0.17 to 0.19 standard deviations higher on math exams and 0.02 to 0.03 standard deviations higher on ELA exams compared to demographically similar students in other Massachusetts districts" (Schueler, Goodman, Deming, 2016). The study also finds that students who participated in the "Acceleration Academies", a specific intervention that offered additional learning time for at-risk students during vacations, can explain a large share of the achievement gains.