

Empower Academy

Our Promise to Parents

DePendability

Creativity

Positivity

ComMunity

Credibility

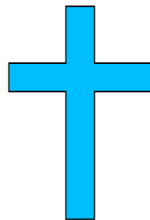
IncluSivity

IntEgrity

11 E. Jefferson Street
Sullivan, IL, 61951

Open from
6:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

School Age Program Handbook



Mission Statement

Our mission at Empower Academy is to provide a nurturing environment that promotes learning and development of the whole child, including spiritual, social, and academic. We value the uniqueness of each child and family we serve. Our educators' mission is to provide a safe and developmentally appropriate learning environment, which fosters a child's natural instinct to explore, discover, create and become a lifelong learner.

Philosophy

Our philosophy is based upon our core values at Empower Academy.

Dependability - You can count on us to provide a safe, nurturing, and structured environment where your child is cared for with love, attention, and professionalism. We deliver reliable schedules resulting in consistent care allowing you to have peace of mind as a busy parent.

Creativity - We believe in nurturing each child's imagination, curiosity, and unique way of thinking. Children learn best when they are encouraged to explore, express, and invent through hands-on, meaningful experiences resulting in confident, independent thinkers.

Positivity - We provide an uplifting environment where children feel safe and surrounded by God's love. Our staff speak to children with kindness and encouragement focusing on each child's strengths and achievements.

Community - We are more than just a preschool, we are a family. Rooted in faith, we strive to create meaningful connections between children, families, & staff.

Credibility - Our staff are highly trained and grounded in Christian values, ensuring your child is in safe and nurturing hands. We are committed to doing what is right, keeping our word, and operating with excellence in all we do.

Inclusivity - Every child and family is welcomed, loved, and valued - just as they are. We teach children that God's love is for everyone and we model kindness, empathy, and compassion in our daily interactions.

Integrity - We speak truthfully with families and children, even in difficult moments, and always with grace and respect. You can feel confident that your child is being nurtured in a place where values aren't just taught - they're modeled by our staff and lived out daily.

Staff & Contacts

Brightwheel is the main form of communication and should be used first unless in case of an emergency.

On the Go Phone Number - 217-909-9111 - receives text messages

Empower Academy Land Line - 217-728-9111

Executive Director - Miss Melissa Krieger - melissa@myempoweracademy.com
Questions, concerns, suggestions

Associate Director - Miss Casey Smith - casey@myempoweracademy.com
Day to day program information, questions, & concerns

Assistant Director - Miss Brittany Payne - brittany@myempoweracademy.com
Day to day program information, questions, & concerns

Office Manager - Melissa Lynch - admin@myempoweracademy.com
Enrollment / Billing questions & concerns

Visit our website for a complete list of all teachers & support staff.
www.myempoweracademy.com

Enrollment

Before you can attend you must complete our admissions packet through Brightwheel which includes providing the following documentation:

- **Birth certificate**
- **Physical** - done when entering Kindergarten & 6th grade
- **Immunization records** - updated from when entering Kindergarten & 6th grade

We recommend asking the school or your child's doctor office to give you a copy.

A one-time admission fee of \$25 is required at the time of enrollment.

You are enrolling for the 25-26 school year beginning August 13, 2025 - May 22, 2026.

Program Overview

Our school age program includes:

- Before and After School Care *including transportation to and from SES*
 - Including SES early-dismissal hours
- No School Day Care

Tuition

Before & After School Care Rates Per Week

\$100	5 days per week
\$84	4 days per week
\$66	3 days per week
\$48	2 days per week
\$25	1 day per week

No School Day Care

\$20	Additional charge for participants that attend the day it occurs on
\$45	Everyone else

Payments

Tuition is paid via ACH auto-pay through Brightwheel. An invoice will be sent on Wednesday the week before tuition is due and will run automatically on that Friday with your saved autopay. Failed payments will automatically be re-processed. 72 hour unpaid invoices due to insufficient funds or errors on the parent's behalf will be charged a \$25 fee. Repeated incidents could result in the termination of childcare services. Your child will be dismissed from our program if you are more than 2 weeks behind.

Subsidized Care - Illinois Child Care Assistance Program

Empower Academy accepts childcare assistance. Parents will be responsible for full payments until authorization has been received and then a monthly copay after a determination amount has been calculated. If at any time assistance is stopped, parents will be responsible for full tuition as of the date the assistance ended.

Late Pick-Up Policy

The center closes at 5:30pm, Monday-Friday. Parents will be charged \$5 a minute for every minute a child is present after their contracted pick-up time. You will be invoiced & charged within 48 hours based off of the sign-out time in Brightwheel.

If parents do not arrive to pick up their child from the program by 5:30 p.m. staff will try to contact the parents using all phone numbers provided. If parents are unable to be reached, staff members will then try to contact all emergency/approved pick-up contacts. By 6:00 p.m. if staff members are unable to reach someone to pick up the child the Director present will notify the Sullivan Police Department.

Holidays & Closures - During the School Year

To keep high-quality staff at our facility we have chosen to close to observe holidays and professional development days. During the school year there are 5 days that families WILL be charged while we are closed. This makes your weekly amount due the same every week - *except for additional charges if attending No School Days.*

- New Years Day
- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving Day
- Christmas Eve
- Christmas

If the holiday falls on a weekend day, the center will close during the week. For example, if New Year's Day falls on a Saturday, we may close on Friday or Monday. Families will be given notice ahead of time on which dates are chosen.

Daily Activities

Before School

- We will provide a morning snack of breakfast type items. Children will arrive at school in time to eat a full breakfast at SES.
- Morning activities will encourage calm table top choices and cozy corner options.
- Students will be picked up by Sullivan School buses at approximately 7:30 a.m.
 - *This time could change, especially when we move locations.*

After School

- Students will be dropped off by Sullivan School buses at approximately 3:30 p.m.
 - *This time could change, especially when we move locations.*
- We will provide a healthy balanced afternoon snack & drink.
- Homework help is provided, but parents can request for their child to do it at home if they prefer.
- Afternoon activities will include the following free play choices:
 - Outside play - *we can't wait for our new location's playground!*
 - STEAM activities
 - Pretend play
 - Age appropriate centers & games

No School Days

- We will provide the following food
 - Breakfast
 - Morning Snack
 - Lunch
 - Afternoon Snack
- Daily schedules will vary based on the theme, activity, and possible field trip

Arrival & Departure Procedures

Please park and come inside and check your child in/out at the front desk through Brightwheel.

ONLY adults listed in your Brightwheel as authorized pick ups will be allowed to pick up your child.

On No School Days, if your child does not arrive by 9:00 a.m. they may miss an activity or need to be dropped off wherever we are traveling to that day.

Attendance

Regular attendance is strongly encouraged for the benefit of the child as well as the classroom as a whole. Any time your child will be absent, please notify your teacher via Brightwheel. You are charged the same whether you attend or not. Enrollment will be terminated if a child is absent for a period of a week or more, and no notice has been received or contact made by the family.

Illinois Child Care Assistance Program: If a child's attendance falls below the required 80% attendance rate, Empower Academy has the right to terminate services.

Health & Safety Policies

Illness

Our first priority is providing a healthy, safe learning environment for all children. Children cannot be in a group setting if they have any of the following:

- Temperature above 100 degrees
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Rash, sores, or open wounds - unless cleared by a doctor

If symptoms develop during the day, the child will be isolated until someone can come and get them. The child must be free of symptoms 24 hours before returning to the center. Parents will be notified of communicable diseases contracted by any child at the center, so symptoms can be observed (Licensing #407.31) The center reserves the right to make the final determination of exclusion due to illness.

Medications

If it is necessary to give medication during the day, the Medication Authorization Form must be filled out FIRST by the child's doctor and is available in Brightwheel. All medicine must be accompanied by written instructions on the bottle: child's name, doctor, dosage, method and time. Medication will be properly labeled and stored in a designated refrigerator, out of reach of the children, outside of the classroom. Prescription and non-prescription medicine must be in original containers.

Hand Washing

Frequent hand washing with soap and warm, running water is the most effective way to reduce and prevent the spread of illnesses commonly found in childcare such as the flu, diarrhea, and pink eye. Parents are encouraged to assist their child in the hand washing process upon arrival.

Other times your child (and staff members) will be expected to wash their hands:

- After using the toilet
- Before and after mealtimes
- Before and after administering medication
- After handling bodily fluids (mucus, blood, vomit)
- After coming indoors from the playground
- After cleaning or handling garbage

Warm, running water (no colder than 60 degrees F) and soap must be used. Hands must be rubbed vigorously for at least 20 seconds, including the backs of hands, between fingers, under nails, and under any jewelry. A disposable paper towel should be used to dry hands and turn off the faucet. Help reinforce the importance of hand washing by encouraging frequent hand washing at home as well.

Accident or Injury

In case of accident or injury, the Director and/or a staff member using his/her discretion, will follow the procedures listed below.

1. Emergency first aid will be administered.
2. The parent/guardian may be called and requested to come immediately and attend to the child's needs.
3. If the Center cannot reach the parent or another emergency contact, the child's physician will be phoned for instructions.
4. If a child requires emergency medical care, he/she will be taken to the emergency room and the parent/guardian will be notified immediately.
5. An accident report giving an account of the incident by the staff member who witnessed it will be completed and kept in the child's file. Parents are informed either verbally or via Brightwheel.

Mandatory Child Abuse Reporters

As childcare professionals who interact with children daily, each staff member of Empower Academy is a mandatory child abuse and neglect reporter and must contact the Illinois Department of Human Services whenever abuse or neglect is suspected.

Drug Free Premises

Empower Academy is a drug, alcohol, and smoke free working environment. Smoking or vaping of any kind will not be allowed on the premises. If your child is dropped off smelling like marijuana or other "distracting" odors you will be contacted to pick them up and change their clothing and/or belongings. Parents who smell of marijuana or other "distracting" odors will be asked to leave the premises.

Guidance & Discipline

At Empower Academy, we are committed to fostering a safe and nurturing environment where positive discipline and behavioral guidance help children grow into loving disciples of Jesus. These guidelines reflect our dedication to promoting healthy development while maintaining respect, consistency, and confidential communication between parents and staff. The expected code of conduct for all children is based on Christian behavior. All teachers will help the children to understand the expectations of their classroom.

We believe that building quality relationships with our students is the foundation of guidance and discipline. Our teachers incorporate positive guidance techniques such as modeling, encouraging expected behaviors, and giving simple choices with clear and reasonable limits. By establishing routines, expectations, and natural consequences, children are encouraged to learn from their mistakes. Our teachers and environment create opportunities for children to work together and learn as well as develop social skills in the areas of cooperation, helping, and talking with others to solve conflicts.

The goal of discipline is to help children to develop social-emotional regulation; therefore, it is necessary for children to understand rules and the reasons for them and to understand the consequences of their actions. The following techniques are used at Empower Academy:

- Distracting and redirecting children from potential problems
- Reminding children of the rules
- Helping children to solve problems and to make appropriate choices
- Noticing and reinforcing positive behavior
- Helping children to articulate their feelings
- Helping children to understand the consequences of their actions
- Allowing children to take time away from the group to regain control, if necessary

Teachers use a calm down period (formally known as time-out) to help children manage their behavior and learn from their actions. It's not meant to be punitive but more of a teaching moment. When someone is having difficulty following the class rules or needs time to calm down, the teacher may implement a time-out period (the minutes being no longer than the child's age). During this time, the child can reflect on his/her behavior and think about how to make better choices. It's a way for the teacher to create a positive learning environment and promote responsible behavior in the classroom.

The following actions will never be used with children at our Center:

- Corporal punishment, verbal abuse, emotional abuse or threats
- A child or group of children disciplining another child
- Unsupervised isolation of a child
- Threatening or withholding of basic necessities, including food, rest, or use of the bathroom, as punishment

Intervention is crucial when a child exhibits concerning behaviors or significantly delayed developmental milestones. Our approach involves observing and documenting the child's behavior, then communicating these concerns to the parents. We work collaboratively with parents to create a classroom action plan and provide resources, allowing external health professionals to visit the daycare for therapy or assessments if needed. If, after these steps, we determine that our program is not the best environment for the child's specific needs, we will communicate this decision and assist in transitioning to another care setting. Our goal is to ensure the child receives the appropriate care and support to thrive.

Field Trips

All field trips are under the supervision of Empower Academy staff. Health and safety precautions are taken in compliance with DCFS standards. Head counts will be taken before leaving the center, after entering the vehicle, during a field trip, after taking children to the restroom, after returning to the vehicle, and upon returning to the center. When children leave the vehicle, the vehicle shall be inspected to ensure no children are left in the vehicle. Permission forms are to be completed upon enrollment. Additionally, specific permission forms may be required for different activities or field trips.

Transportation

Empower Academy uses our 15 passenger ford-transit vans or contracts school buses & drivers through the Sullivan School.

Food Service Policy

At Empower Academy, children are provided with nutritious meals and snacks. The center follows the nutritional guidelines established by the child and adult Food Program. Menus will be shared via Brightwheel. Children will be encouraged to sample all foods that are offered but will never be forced to eat. Please inform your child's teacher if your child cannot eat a certain food or has different dietary needs (e.g. vegetarian, vegan, lactose intolerant) so a substitution can be made. For certain dietary restrictions, you may be asked to provide food from home for your child.

Food From Home - Birthday Celebrations

Children are welcome to bring in treats to celebrate a birthday or holiday. Due to various food allergies and dietary restrictions in our classrooms, we require items to be store-bought, in the original packaging, and items pre-approved by the staff. Please make sure to message your teacher at least 1 week in advance to plan the treat.

Connected Community

Brightwheel

Brightwheel is an app to help parents stay connected with their child and teacher during school hours. Empower Academy uses Brightwheel to communicate, share photos, notes and incidents.

Newsletters/Calendars

Monthly communication will be posted and sent via Brightwheel. This provides you with general information and announcements about the program and the detailed month's calendar and activities.

Parent Participation

Parent participation is strongly encouraged in our program. Some possible opportunities to participate and contribute to your child's experience:

- Welcome to plan lunch dates, guest readers, bring in a craft project
- Collection of materials for art projects, dramatic play props, etc.

Program Evaluations

Empower Academy asks parents to complete a program evaluation annually. The information gathered from these anonymous surveys is used by the staff to develop goals for our center and to improve the overall quality of care at our center. A parent's point of view is different from a teacher's point of view. Therefore, parent feedback on the program evaluations is very important to the success of our program and satisfaction of our families.

Emergency Procedures

A monthly fire drill and two seasonal tornado drills will be established and implemented to assure prompt evacuation of the building in case of an emergency. This will be done in a manner as not to frighten your child, but to assure him of his safety.

Fire

In the event of a fire and/or the fire alarm is set off, all teachers and children in the center will exit through the exits located off each of their classrooms. Teachers will be responsible for counting heads to ensure that all of their students have exited the building. When all children have evacuated the building, the designee will be responsible for exiting with the master attendance record and will check roll.

Tornado

In the event of a tornado, children will be placed in the designated area throughout the building. They will be instructed to kneel and cover their heads. Teachers will space themselves among the children. The designee will take attendance into the designated areas and record attendance.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a top priority for Empower Academy. Personal information from families and staff will not be shared for any reason without prior written consent of the individual. When discussing a child's activities and friends in the classroom, only the first names will be used. In situations regarding behavior problems and incidents/accidents, names of children involved will never be given to families. Brightwheel will be used to communicate between parents and staff. Please know that staff can read messages sent. Please keep this communication to things you do not mind staff reading.

Records

Each fall, Empower Academy completes an audit of enrollment records. At the conclusion of this audit, families will be notified if anything needs to be updated per Illinois DCFS rules.

Physicals and Immunizations

Each child must have a current physical and immunization record on file to attend. The immunization records must be updated whenever a new immunization is received. In addition, any time a family's information changes such as address, place of employment or health insurance provider, new forms must be completed.

Insurance

Empower Academy has a liability insurance policy that covers general liability of \$1 million per occurrence and \$2 million aggregate. Also a policy covering transportation of \$500,000 combined single limits.

Inclement Weather Closings

Activities & field trip schedules may change due to weather & transportation availability. We will communicate any changes, but will not offer refunds.

Electronics

Personal electronic devices are NOT allowed to be used at Empower Academy. They must remain in the child's backpack, unless it is their school issued iPad being used for homework or studying. We will provide our electronic devices to be used following DCFS usage guidelines when appropriate.

Train children in the way they should go; when they grow old, they won't depart from it.
-Proverbs 22:6