

# State and National Schools of Character

## 2017 Application Guidelines for Schools and Districts

The application has five parts. Applicants will be able to navigate from part to part without having to complete one part before moving to another.

### Part I

Application information and demographics

### Part II

Describe the school's character journey in 1500 characters or less.

#### Overview of school and character education journey [1500 characters max]

Use these questions to guide the narrative of this section:

- How and why did you begin your character initiative?
- What challenges have you faced as a school community?
- What is your character initiative trying to accomplish?
- How were parents, teachers, and community members brought on board?

You will also be asked to list three resources that have influenced the school's character education journey.

### Part III

Self Assessment Implementation of the 11 Principles

*Schools may use the assessment tool to distribute the rubric for stakeholders to score the implementation of the 11 Principles. There is an opportunity for students to also be included, but this may be impossible for young elementary students so it is not required. The applicant will provide email addresses for stakeholders and the assessment will be compiled automatically.*

*Also, the school will describe the implementation of each Principle. For each Principle questions will be provided. Applicants may click on "Questions to Consider" and "Examples of Evidence" and a box will appear with the questions or examples below. Note that these tips are taken directly from the 11 Principles or the Application Guidelines. They are nothing new. They are intended to be a final check or resource for applicants to be sure that they have addressed all the key indicators in their applications or to give applicants some ideas about what they might address or include. Application screeners may also find them useful, especially when writing feedback for applicants and offering suggestions about what might strengthen an application.*

**Principle 1: The school community promotes core ethical and performance values as the foundation of good character. [2,500 characters max]**

#### Questions to Consider

1.1 Stakeholders in the school community select or assent to a set of core values.

- What are your core values? (You may call these pillars, virtues, traits, expectations, or a touchstone, for example.)
- How, when, why, and by whom were these selected and adopted? If they have been in place for some time or were selected at the district level, how do you revisit and reflect upon them?

1.2 Core ethical and performance values actively guide every aspect of life in the school.

- Do students, staff, and parents use common language reflecting the school’s core values? How is this common language taught and promoted?
- How do staff teach, model, and integrate the core values into all aspects of school life?

1.3 The school community articulates its character-related goals and expectations through visible statements of its core ethical and performance values.

- What is your school’s mission, and how does the school mission statement align with your core values and/or character initiative?
- How are the core values made visible to your school community?
- How are what the core values “look like” and “sound like” seen in terms of observable behaviors?

**For districts only:**

How does the district incorporate core values in its community and public relations efforts?  
 How has the district established core values as part of its vision, mission, goals, objectives, regulations, and policies, and seeks to promote a community of adults and students based on a commitment to excellence and ethics?

**School or district will upload two word or pdf documents to demonstrate the presence of this principle in your school or district. DO NOT include pictures as evidence, and limit documents to 1-3 pages.**

**Suggested types of evidence**

- An interview form used in hiring with questions tied to core values
- Newsletters that highlight and/or reinforce core values
- Handbook examples with core values present
- Mission statement which includes core values
- Promotional materials with core values
- Agendas for staff meeting with inclusion of value work
- Student essays regarding values
- Lesson plans with time allotted for value work

**Principle 2: *The school defines “character” comprehensively to include thinking, feeling, and doing.* [2,500 characters max]**

***Questions to Consider***

**Principle 2.1 - The School or District helps students acquire a developmentally appropriate understanding of what the core values mean in everyday behavior and grasp the reasons why some behaviors (e.g., doing your best and respecting others) represent good character and their opposites do not.**

- How does staff help students understand the core values and how the core values can help them make good choices
- How do students demonstrate this understanding?

**Principle 2.2 - The School or District helps students reflect upon the core values, appreciate them, desire to demonstrate them, and become committed to them.**

- How do staff help students become committed to core values?
- What opportunities do students have to reflect on the core values through discussions of real-life problems and situations?
- How do staff meet students' needs for safety, belonging, competence, and autonomy?

**Principle 2.3 - The School or District helps students practice the core values so that they become habitual patterns of behavior.**

- How do staff encourage students to examine their own behavior in light of the core values and challenge them to make their behavior consistent with the core values?
- What practice in and feedback on academic and behavioral skills do students receive through everyday classroom operations? (classroom meetings)
- What opportunities do students have to practice the core values in the context of working with other students on class activities? (cross-age buddies, peer mentors, cooperative learning, or other collaborative strategies)

**School or district will upload one word or pdf documents to demonstrate the presence of this principle in your school or district. DO NOT include pictures as evidence, and limit documents to 1-3 pages.**

**Types of evidence**

- Class meeting agendas with character components
- Cross-age buddies documentation
- Cooperative learning lesson plans
- Class room routines and policies that help students understand and adopt core values
- Behavior expectations with definitions
- Goal setting, journaling, reflective writing

**Principle 3: *The school uses a comprehensive, intentional, and proactive approach to character development.* [2,500 characters max]**

***Questions to Consider***

3.1 The school is intentional and proactive in addressing character at all grade levels.

- Explain how individual teachers, grade-level teams, and the staff as a whole participate in planning for character education.
- What is your plan for character education? Is this a school or district level plan?

**For districts only:**

How does the district define character education clearly and comprehensively, emphasizing that ~~it~~ it is a process that demands integration into all aspects of school life?

3.2 Character education is integrated into academic content and instruction.

- How do teachers teach core values through their academic subjects and provide opportunities for students to discuss ethical issues?
- What examples can you give of lessons from teachers in diverse subject areas that explicitly include curricular integration of character?

**For districts only:**

How is character education included in academic curriculum frameworks?

3.3 Character education is a priority in how teachers conduct their classes.

- How do classroom routines and procedures address student needs and demonstrate respect for students?

3.4 Character education is infused throughout the school day in classes, sports, meetings, and co-curricular activities.

- How do you communicate clear expectations of good character throughout the total school program (e.g., sports, clubs) and in all areas of the school (e.g., cafeteria, halls, playground, sports fields, library, buses)?

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***Types of Evidence***

- Agendas from character ed team meetings
- Lesson plans with ethical issues or character ed components
- Strategic plan for character ed
- Classroom rules or guidelines tied to core values
- Syllabus for class with character education focus
- Class meeting agendas that include character components
- Curriculum frameworks that demonstrate integration of character education
- Documents showing character ed is infused throughout campus not only in classrooms (e.g. bus, cafeteria, sports, music...)

**Principle 4: *The school creates a caring community.* [2,500 characters max]**

***Questions to Consider***

4.1 The school makes it a high priority to foster caring attachments between students and staff. Do students perceive staff as caring and report that they could go to an adult in the school with a problem? How do you know?

- Do students perceive staff as caring and report that they could go to an adult in the school with a problem?
- How do they know?
- Do staff attend school events?
- Does the school encourage students and teachers to meet in small group settings such as class meetings or advisor-advisee periods?
- Do staff provide extra help in academic work and counsel or mentor students when needed?

4.2 The school makes it a high priority to help students form caring attachments to each other.

- Do students perceive their peers as friendly and inclusive?
- How do you know?
- What educational strategies does the school use to encourage mutual respect among students?

4.3 The school takes steps to prevent peer cruelty and violence and deals with it effectively when it occurs.

- What anti-bullying strategies and/or programs do you use?
- What impact have they had?
- What activities, programs, and processes that promote tolerance, understanding, respect, and peace among students do you have?
- How do staff deal with and discourage peer abuse and encourage respect among students?

4.4 The school makes it a high priority to foster caring attachments among adults within the school community.

- How are parents, community members, and guests made to feel welcome in the school?
- What efforts do staff make to form positive relationships with students' families?
- How do staff perceive the work environment?
- How are relationships nurtured among staff?
- How does the administration foster a collegial atmosphere?
- How has the character development plan impacted staff morale and teacher turnover.

**For districts only:**

How does the staff at the district level make efforts to develop caring and respectful relationships among themselves, with staff at the school level, and in the broader community?

**School or district will upload one word or pdf documents to demonstrate the presence of this principle in your school or district. DO NOT include pictures as evidence, and limit documents to 1-3 pages.**

***Types of Evidence***

- Surveys to speak to relationships
- Evidence of events outside of the classroom where students and staff attend.
- Documents from programs or strategies being used to build positive relationships (e.g. school/community events, mentoring/tutoring, tolerance programs, anti-bullying strategies, class meetings, advisories, conflict resolution strategies, staff gatherings and celebrations, school events, and home visits)
- Data that demonstrates strength in relationships

**Principle 5: *The school provides students with opportunities for moral action.* [2,500 characters max]**

***Questions to Consider***

5.1 The school sets clear expectations for students to engage in actions that develop and demonstrate good character.

- What are the school's expectations regarding service learning?
- How are your expectations for peaceful conflict resolution, academic integrity, good sportsmanship, and service to others taught? How can you be sure students know these expectations and that students and staff take responsibility for these expectations?
- How many students participated in service learning activities during the most recent school year?

**For districts only:**

How does the district encourage and set clear guidelines and expectations for service to others, academic integrity, and good sportsmanship and makes explicit that service learning includes student voice and choice, integration into the curriculum, and a reflection component?

5.2 The school provides all students with varied opportunities for engaging in positive, responsible action within the school, and students engage in these opportunities and reflect on them.

- How does your School or District provide opportunities for students to engage in service within the school and to engage in projects to practice and/or advance conflict resolution, ethical decision-making, and academic integrity?
- How many students are involved in service projects and how many benefit from these opportunities?
- How do teachers connect such service to the curriculum and core values (service learning)?

5.3 The school provides all students with repeated and varied opportunities for making contributions to the larger community, and students engage in these opportunities and reflect on them.

- What opportunities do students have to participate in service learning projects that contribute to the larger community?
- How many students are involved in service projects and how many benefit from these opportunities?
- How do teachers connect community service with the curriculum and core values, creating service learning experiences?
- Do you enable students to assess community needs, create ideas for meeting those needs, plan and coordinate service learning projects, and reflect on the positive consequences of community service?
- How many students participated in service learning activities during the last school year

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***Types of Evidence***

- Service learning calendar of events / opportunities
- Conflict resolution / peer mediation strategies, trainings
- Sportsmanship policies
- Academic integrity policies / expectations
- Examples of students serving the school (e.g., buddies, school beautification, leadership groups, peer mediators)
- Examples of students serving the wider community (e.g., elderly, needy, veterans, animals, environment)
- Examples that demonstrate how service projects allow students to identify community needs, plan/organize projects, and reflect on outcomes.
- Examples that demonstrate that service projects are tied to content/curriculum

***Principle 6: The school offers a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners, develops their character, and helps them to succeed. [2,500 characters max]***

**Questions to Consider**

6.1 The academic curriculum provides meaningful and appropriate challenges to all students.

- How do teachers provide all students with opportunities to interact with academic content in engaging, hands-on, appropriate ways?
- How do you know students are excited about learning and feel challenged?
- How does instruction increase students' sense of competence and emphasizes student autonomy?

6.2 The school staff identifies, understands, and accommodates the diverse interests, cultures, and learning needs of all students.

- How does staff engage in ongoing identification of response to students' learning needs and cultural differences?
- What efforts are made to differentiate instruction?
- How do staff challenge and help all students do high-quality work and strive for continuous improvement?
- What achievement gaps between diverse student subgroups exist? What active steps are you taking to eliminate such gaps?

6.3 Teachers promote the development of performance character traits that support students' intellectual growth, academic performance, and capacity for both self-direction and teamwork.

- How do teachers promote thinking habits that lead to intellectual growth in students?
- How do students set goals and are aware of their growth as learners?
- How do teachers promote work-related habits that help students do their best work?
- How do teachers promote social habits that help students work together harmoniously?

**School or district will upload one word or pdf documents to demonstrate the presence of this principle in your school or district. DO NOT include pictures as evidence, and limit documents to 1-3 pages.**

#### ***Types of Evidence***

- Examples of challenging, hands-on lessons and projects
- Examples of differentiated instruction
- Examples of sensitivity to cultural differences
- Examples of programs and strategies being used to address achievement gap issues
- Examples of strategies being used to help students set and reach goals
- Examples of students having "voice and choice" in the classroom

**Principle 7: *The school fosters students' self-motivation.* [2,500 characters max]**

#### ***Questions to Consider***

7.1 Staff and students recognize and celebrate the natural, beneficial consequences of acts of character rather than rewarding students with material recognition or rewards.

- How are students helped to understand on a personal level what it means to be self-motivated and why it is important?
- How have staff addressed the question of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation?
- Have staff reflected on whether their practices develop self-motivation?
- Have they sought agreement on a shared philosophy regarding praise, rewards, and punishment?
- Are students recognized for good behavior or displaying core values? If so, how?
- How do classroom management strategies promote doing the right thing because it's the right thing to do?
- What methods of academic instruction enable students to produce work of which they should be proud?

- Does your school integrate PBIS (Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support) with character education? If so, how does this work in your school setting?
- Do staff and students recognize and express positive comments to each other as part of the everyday life of the school?

**For districts only:**

How does your district use its public relations programs to focus attention on outstanding acts of good character?

7.2 The school’s approach to student conduct uses all aspects of behavior management—including rule-setting and rule-enforcement—as opportunities to foster students’ character development, especially their understanding of and commitment to core values.

- What is your school’s /district's approach to behavior management and discipline?
- How are staff trained in developmentally appropriate forms of classroom management?
- How does the discipline code use explanation, discussion, and natural and logical consequences in ways that help students learn from their mistakes and move forward?
- What role do students have in classroom management and school governance?

**School or district will upload one word or pdf documents to demonstrate the presence of this principle in your school or district. DO NOT include pictures as evidence, and limit documents to 1-3 pages.**

***Types of Evidence***

- Behavior management / positive discipline strategies and policies
- Opportunities for students to reflect on their choices in light of core values (e.g. Think Sheets)
- Examples of staff development / training / discussions on topics such as behavior/classroom management and motivation
- Examples of students modeling good character without the presence of extrinsic rewards

***Principle 8: The school staff is an ethical learning community that shares responsibility for character education and adheres to the same core values that guide the students. [2,500 characters max]***

***Questions to Consider***

8.1 Staff model the core values in their interactions with students and each other, and students and parents perceive that they do.

- How do staff model core values in their interactions with students?
- How do they demonstrate respectful and supportive behavior?
- Do they see themselves as models for students?
- Do students and their parents view staff as models?

8.2 The school includes all staff in planning, receiving staff development for, and carrying out the school wide character education initiative.

- Do all professional and support staff receive training and information on their role in the character education initiative?
- Do administrators, teachers, and counselors receive ongoing staff development?



- What recent professional development activities related to character development and opportunities for sharing have staff had?
- Do all staff have opportunities to be involved in character education planning and implementation?
- Are teachers, administrators, and counselors substantially involved?

8.3 The school makes time available for staff planning and reflection in regard to character education.

- Do aspects of the character education initiative regularly appear on the agenda for faculty meetings and in-service days?
  - Does the administration provide staff release time for developing promising ideas, planning events, and reflection?
- Do teachers use core values to reflect on their own behaviors and procedures?

**For districts only:**

How does your district encourage sharing information by providing venues for collaboration among schools; establishing a centralized source of materials, curricula, and other tools; and sponsoring regular conferences or meetings on character education?

**School or district will upload one word or pdf documents to demonstrate the presence of this principle in your school or district. DO NOT include pictures as evidence, and limit documents to 1-3 pages.**

***Types of Evidence***

- Evidence of staff modeling of core values
- Examples of / agendas from staff development /training
- Faculty meeting agendas that show commitment to character education
- Examples of resources provided to staff/faculty

**Principle 9: *The school fosters shared leadership and long-range support of the character education initiative.***  
**[2,500 characters max]**

***Questions to Consider***

9.1 The school’s character education initiative has leaders, including the school principal, who champion character education efforts, share leadership, and provide long-range support.

- What role does the school principal play in championing the character effort?
- What would happen if the principal left?
- How do school leaders show their support for the long-range survival and growth of the character initiative?
- How does your school or district act as a leader in helping others schools with their character education efforts?

**For districts only:**

- Is character education a shared priority with your district board and district superintendent?
- Does the district hire school principals and central office personnel committed to character education and encourage them to incorporate character education into their work and evaluation of staff?
- Does the district require central office personnel (e.g., superintendents, athletic directors, directors of guidance and other student and administrative services) to incorporate character education into their work?

9.2 A leadership group or structure (several linked groups) inclusive of staff, students, and parents guides the ongoing planning and implementation of the character education initiative and encourages the involvement of the whole school in character-related activities.

- What group or structure guides character education strategic planning and implementation? Who is a part of this group? How often does this group meet? How do they plan? How do they get input from stakeholders?
- How do the school's regular governing mechanisms assume responsibility for management of character-related policies and plans?

**For districts only:**

Does an on-going district-community character education committee guide the planning and implementation of district wide character education efforts?

Does the committee include representatives of local government agencies, business partners, religious organizations, youth organizations, parents, students, and staff representatives from the school?

9.3 Students are explicitly involved in creating and maintaining a sense of community and in other leadership roles that contribute to the character education effort.

- What role do students have in creating and maintaining standards of behavior?
- What leadership roles and responsibilities do they have within the classroom and school community?
- Do they value the leadership roles available to them and see themselves as contributing members of the wider community? How do you know?

**School or district will upload one word or pdf documents to demonstrate the presence of this principle in your school or district. DO NOT include pictures as evidence, and limit documents to 1-3 pages.**

***Types of Evidence***

- Character education committee (or other committee or structure) plans, goals, meeting minutes, membership – including the diversity of the committee (e.g. staff, parents, community members, and students where age appropriate)
- Examples of staff and student leadership
- Outreach efforts and plans, evidence of leadership in the field of character education (e.g., in-services, workshops, visits hosted)
- Principal/administration champions the character education initiative

**Principle 10: *The school engages families and community members as partners in the character-building effort.***  
**[2,500 characters max]**

**Questions to Consider**

10.1 The school engages families in the character education initiative.

- Do parents serve in character education leadership roles?
- Are they actively involved in carrying the character initiative to the parent-teacher organization and parent community?
- Are families aware of and supportive of the initiative? How do you know?
- Do you offer workshops and resources on character education and general parenting skills?
- How do parents contribute to school and classroom activities beyond fundraising?
- How does the school reach out to and welcome all parents?

10.2 The administration and faculty regularly communicate with parents and guardians, providing suggestions and activities that help them reinforce the core values, and they survey parents, both formally and informally, on the effectiveness of the school's character education efforts.

- How do you communicate with families about your character education efforts?
- How do you solicit input from families?
- How do you welcome new families to the school and orient them to the school's character education mission?

10.3 The school recruits the help of the wider community.

- Do community members serve in character education leadership roles?
- Are they actively involved in carrying the character initiative to the larger community?
- Are community members aware of and supportive of the initiative? How do you know?
- Do community members volunteer in the school and participate in school and classroom events?

**For districts only:**

How does the district engage a broad spectrum of the community in its character education initiative? How does it involve appropriate local government agencies, youth-serving organizations, and the business community?

**School or district will upload one word or pdf documents to demonstrate the presence of this principle in your school or district. DO NOT include pictures as evidence, and limit documents to 1-3 pages.**

***Types of Evidence***

- Examples of communicating with parents (e.g. newsletters, phone, e-mail, website)
- Examples of receiving communications from parents (e.g. surveys, meetings, informal chats)
- Parent workshops and resources offered to families
- Efforts/activities to welcome new families
- Examples of parent and community member leadership and involvement
- Volunteer opportunities for parents and community members
- Evidence of partnerships with local community organizations and businesses

**Principle 11: *The school regularly assesses its culture and climate, the functioning of its staff as character educators, and the extent to which its students manifest good character.*** Be sure in your narrative response and attached evidence for this Principle that you clearly demonstrate the impact of character education on student academic achievement, student behavior, and school culture/climate. Be sure to provide specific quantitative and qualitative evidence. Use numbers rather than percentages when reporting changes in student behavior. The narrative and supporting evidence combined should demonstrate that your community has gathered data, reflected on it, and then acted as needed. **[2,500 characters max]**

**Questions to Consider**

11.1 The school sets goals and regularly assesses (both quantitatively and qualitatively) its culture, climate, and functioning as an ethical learning community.

- How do you assess your character initiative?
- What data and input do you gather?

- How do you use data to make changes and improvements to the character education initiative?

**For districts only:**

How does your district arrange for and finance assessment of the district’s character education initiative?

11.2 Staff members reflect upon and report on their efforts to implement character education, as well as on their growth as character educators.

- What feedback do teachers gather from their students on their perceptions of character-related activities and the extent to which teachers are modeling the core values?
- How does staff report to each other and to stakeholders on their efforts to meet character education goals?
- What opportunities does staff have to examine and reflect on data?

**For districts only:**

How does the district evaluate implementation of character education into the assessment of school principals and in turn, are principals asked to evaluate integration of character education into their assessments of school staff?

11.3 The school assesses student progress in developing an understanding of and a commitment to good character and the degree to which students act upon the core values.

- What approaches do you use to assess student progress in the area of character development?
- What data collected on student behavior demonstrates student growth in the understanding of and commitment to good character?

**School or district will upload four word or pdf documents to demonstrate the presence of this principle in your school or district. DO NOT include pictures as evidence, and limit documents to 1-3 pages.**

***Types of Evidence***

- Surveys
  - Agendas of meetings to report and plan to address data
  - Charts and graphs to illustrate data on academic, behavior, and climate data
  - Referral rates
  - Documentation of plans to impact data
  - Documentation of communicating data

**Schools will also be able to upload another artifact of their choosing. Evidence provided should be in pdf or word format, but in this section, applicants may choose to upload a video link that helps to describe their program.**

**Part IV**

**Evidence of Impact**

***The school will provide academic, behavior, and climate data for the past five years.***

***Academic data***

Grade reading test given	Number of students who passed 2015	Number of students who passed 2014	Number of students who passed 2013	Number of students who passed 2012	Number of students who passed 2011

Grade math test given	Number of students who passed 2015	Number of students who passed 2014	Number of students who passed 2013	Number of students who passed 2012	Number of students who passed 2011

### Behavior data

#### Attendance Rate

2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011

#### Number of In School Suspensions (**NO Percentages**)

2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011

#### Number of Out of School Suspensions (**No Percentages**)

2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011

#### Number of Discipline Referrals (**No Percentages**)

2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011

### Culture and data

Survey data that tells:

- Bullying is infrequent and students feel safe
  - It will ask how many participants completed the survey.
  - What question was asked to illustrate that bullying is infrequent and students feel safe?
  - Percentage of students with a positive response.
- Students respect one another
  - It will ask how many participants completed the survey.
  - What question was asked to illustrate that students respect one another.
  - Percentage of students with a positive response.
- Staff respect one another
  - It will ask how many participants completed the survey.
  - What question was asked to illustrate that staff respect one another.

- Percentage of staff with a positive response.
- Teachers and parents respect one another
  - It will ask how many participants completed the survey.
  - What question was asked to illustrate that teacher and parents respect one another.
  - Percentage of stakeholders with a positive response.

## Part V

### Additional Materials

- Photos (Upload five photographs of **character education in action** for promotional purposes. Please **do not** include a photo of the building, posters, collages or objects.) These photos will be used for webpages, magazine, and other promotional opportunities.
- Testimonials (Supply a short quote from a teacher, a member of the staff, a student, a parent, and a community member about the character education initiative)
- Lesson plan
- Promising Practices (List any Promising Practices the school received. Please include the award year.)