



APPLYING TO BECOME A NATIONAL SCHOOL OF CHARACTER

WELCOME!

On behalf of the entire team at Character.org, I want to personally welcome you to our Character.org family. We are so glad you are here!

Whether you are just beginning, or continuing your character journey, you are part of a network of schools committed to embedding character in all aspects of school life. We look forward to working with you and your team to ensure every student at your school understands, cares about, and consistently practices the core values that will help them flourish in school, in relationships and as citizens.

Over 350 volunteers are involved with the Schools of Character program. All of our evaluators are educators and have been through this process with their own schools. This professional development model is at the core of our approach to guiding schools through the school of character process. Our volunteers do this work because earlier volunteers helped them on their school's character journey. Each member of this dedicated team generously gives their time in the true spirit of the phrase 'pay it forward'.

The process of becoming a School of Character is built on *The 11 Principles Framework for Schools: A Guide to Cultivating a Culture of Character*. The framework is designed to provide you with a comprehensive school improvement process that, if fully implemented, will transform the culture of your school.

Important: An update to the 11 Principles was released in November 2023. New guidebooks can be purchased on the Character.org website.

While there are many ways for schools to begin the process of becoming a National School of Character, most schools empower a group of staff members to learn more about each of the *11 Principles* and Key Indicators.

Visit <https://character.org/getting-started/> for more information about next steps.

Please download and save this nine-page document which includes application and announcement dates, and details about the application, evaluation, and certification process.

Please make sure you have a copy of the NEW 11 Principles Guidebook.

We are here to support to you!

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Character.org
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www.character.org



APPLICATION TIMELINE

The 2024 School of Character Application is now closed. Our 2025 Application will open in June on our website. Please make sure you have a copy of the NEW *11 Principles* Guidebook before compiling your narratives and artifacts.

For our 2025 Applicants:

June 2024 – School of Character Application opens on the Character.org website.

November 8, 2024 - School of Character applications due.

The State and National Announcement dates for 2025 will be posted in early June.

For our 2024 Applicants:

Friday, January 26, 2024 - State Schools and Districts of Character will be announced.

Thursday, May 23, 2024 - National Schools and Districts of Character will be announced.

Please contact Lori Soifer, Director Schools of Character, with any questions. lori@character.org

WHO CAN APPLY?

All U.S. and international schools and school districts are eligible to apply.

SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS OF CHARACTER

All schools and school districts who wish to be considered for certification as Schools and Districts of Character complete and submit the School of Character application online. The application can be accessed on the Character.org website. The application fee for schools is \$250.00. for the state (first level) review. District fees are based on the number of schools in the district (see Information for Districts).

There are two levels of review: State and National. Each year, Character.org recognizes State Schools (Districts) of Character. State Schools of Character are eligible to become National Schools (Districts) of Character. International schools go through the same process (first and second level review) with recognition being city name (for first level recognition) and country name (for second level recognition).

National certification is the highest honor bestowed by Character.org

All National Schools and Districts of Character are celebrated and recognized at Character.org's annual Forum.

THE STATE EVALUATION (first level review)

Once your application is submitted, it will be evaluated by a state review team that has been trained by Character.org. The state review team will assess the extent to which your school has fully implemented the *11 Principles*.

In January, Character.org will email each applicant their state report with scores, comments on strengths and areas of growth, and suggestions for promising practices.

The application and evaluation process are designed to support a school's growth. Reflecting on scores and feedback provided in the state report is critical to a school's growth and the continuous improvement process.

To receive State School of Character certification, a total score of 3.3 or higher is required.

Schools receiving scores between 2.7-3.2 will be recognized as Honorable Mention Schools of Character. Schools receiving scores of 2.6 or below will be recognized as Emerging Schools of Character. There is no appeal at the state level.

Honorable Mention and Emerging Schools of Character may apply for state certification in a subsequent year (see Honorable Mention and Emerging Schools of Character applying for State certification below).

Schools and Districts who receive State certification are eligible for National certification.

State Schools of Character with no more than two item scores of 2 on their state report will be invited to participate in that year's national review (see National Evaluation below).

If a State School of Character receives more than two 2's on their state report they **may not** apply for national certification in the same year. Schools decide when they are ready to apply for national certification based on feedback they receive and the strength of their application.

State School of Character certification is valid for 5 years, and schools with this designation remain eligible to apply for national certification during each year's application period for those 5 years.

State Schools of Character applying for national certification in a subsequent year submit a new application to document improvements and growth in their implementation of *the 11 Principles*. The school's application goes directly to the national review and is not part of that year's state review. Schools only pay for the national review.

Applying for national designation when a school is not ready can be disappointing for staff, students, parents and our evaluators. State Schools of Character with 2's should take the time they need to improve those areas before applying for national certification.

Honorable Mention and Emerging Schools of Character Applying for State Certification

Schools who receive Honorable Mention or Emerging designations are eligible for State School of Character certification upon completing and submitting a new application during a subsequent year's application period. We encourage schools to strengthen their character initiative and score a 3.3 or higher on the *11 Principles* self-assessment before applying.

Information about the self-assessment can be found at <https://character.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/2025-Scoring-Guide-and-Self-Assessment.pdf>

THE NATIONAL EVALUATION (second level review)

Schools that receive State School of Character certification, and who have no more than two 2's on their state report, are eligible for national certification and will be asked if they wish to participate in that year's national review using the application already submitted. No edits or revisions can be made to an application during this time.

The national evaluation is a more rigorous review of a school's implementation of the *11 Principles*. National evaluators score the school's application, review the school's state report, and conduct a virtual site visit with the school to determine whether the school meets the criteria to receive national certification. An additional fee of \$250.00 is required for the national review. District fees are based on the number of schools in the district (see Information for Districts)

To receive National School of Character certification, a total score of 3.3 or higher is required and there can be no scores of 2 anywhere on the national report.

How to Prepare for the Virtual Site Visit

No formal preparation is required for the site visit. The purpose of the site visit is for national evaluators to have conversations with members from your school community to determine how deeply character is embedded in all aspects of your school.

National evaluators will want to meet with members of your administrative team, character committee, staff (including non-instructional staff), students, parents, and community members. Plan on approximately 2- 3 hours for the site visit, although it could be slightly less or more depending on what your evaluators want to cover. The school is responsible for providing between 4-7 members from each stakeholder group and making sure they are all able to join the site visit via zoom; either from their classrooms, homes, or in small groups at school. National evaluators will let schools know if they prefer to meet with each group individually or with all participants together. National evaluators contact schools in February to set up a day/time for their site visit. Site visits are scheduled from February through the end of March.

INFORMATION FOR DISTRICTS

Districts are eligible for certification if 51% or more of their individual schools are certified as State or National Schools of Character with proportional representation from elementary and secondary schools (% includes individual schools applying for certification in the same year as the district). If the district has only one high school, that high school must have State or National School of Character status.

District applicants follow the same process as schools and in addition, will be asked to provide a list of all schools; the year(s) of recognition for each certified school, and evidence that shows non-certified schools are making progress toward their own School of Character certification. All non-certified schools must complete the *11 Principles* self-assessment.

To show successful implementation of the *11 Principles*, district applicants will be asked to provide evidence of how the district is supporting the vision of building a culture of character, including; leadership engagement, character development work embedded in strategic planning, resources dedicated district-wide (monetary and human), training, assessment, data collection, and outreach to the community. The application fee for districts is based on the number of schools in the district https://character.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/SoC-Application_Fees.pdf.

Districts who do not meet the 51% threshold but believe they should be considered for certification should contact Character.org's Director of Schools of Character.

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

International schools follow the same process as U.S. schools. There are two levels of review and certification, with the name of the city where the school is located being the first level certification and the name country where the school is located being the second level certification. International schools are asked to submit the application in English. The application fee is \$250.00.

NATIONAL SCHOOLS OF CHARACTER APPLYING FOR RECERTIFICATION

National Schools and Districts of Character apply for recertification in the fall of their 4th year of certification to avoid a lapse in status. For example, schools who received National certification in 2020 would submit an application in the fall of 2024 for recertification in 2025.

Recertifying schools complete and submit a new application and provide information outlined in the recertification guidelines. Schools will be recertified first as a State School of Character and then as a National School of Character, provided they meet the scoring criteria. Recertification applications are reviewed with the same level of rigor as newly applying schools. Schools planning on recertifying will want to make sure they stay current on updates to the *11 Principles* and can show evidence of growth and outreach (mentoring other schools, becoming trained as evaluators, sharing your school's story with colleagues at the state and national level, etc) prior to filling out an application.

Please note: There has been an update to the *11 Principles*. Schools will want to purchase a copy of the new guidebook before starting their recertification process.

Schools who are not ready to apply in their recertification year but who wish to be recertified in a subsequent year should contact Character.org's Director of Schools of Character. More information about recertification can be found at https://character.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Recertification_Guidelines_-2025-.pdf

THE MOCK AUDIT

The Mock Audit is for schools that may not be ready for certification but would like professional feedback on their progress. Schools complete the School of Character application as a Mock Audit and receive written feedback with a score sheet but no designation. The Mock Audit is available year-round with feedback provided on a rolling basis. Applicants should expect feedback within 6-8 weeks. The fee for a Mock Audit is \$250.00.

Schools submitting a mock audit in the same year as applying for school of character certification must submit their mock audit application by August 1st.

After the School of Character application deadline, only Mock Audit applications will be accepted for that year.

PROMISING PRACTICES

Who Can Apply?

All U.S. and international schools and school districts are eligible to submit Promising Practices.

Organizations, sports teams, community partners, and businesses are also eligible.

What is a Promising Practice?

Promising Practices are unique, effective, and replicable practices that both inspire "goodness in action" and contribute to the field of character development.

The practice can be created by a school, district, or organization, and must be aligned with one of the principles articulated in Character.org's *11 Principles* Framework.

Promising Practices are important stepping stones for schools just starting their character journey. Receiving recognition for a Promising Practice is an important sign to staff, students, families, and the community that shows the intentional approach the school is using to embed character into teaching, learning, and school life.

Promising Practices can generate momentum for schools new to the process, and can keep momentum going for schools that have already received certification as a School of Character.

The application is short and easy to fill out. The application fee is \$100.00.

Promising Practice recipients are celebrated and recognized at Character.org's annual Forum.

More information about Promising Practices can be found at <https://character.org/2023-promising-practices/>

APPLICATION INFORMATION: RESOURCES

The NEW 11 Principles Guidebook Available for purchase, we recommend schools have at least one *guidebook* on hand for their team to reference. Please make sure you have an updated copy to review before filling out your application.

Application PDF The School of Character application is available as a PDF, year-round, for reference and staff development. There are links to ‘Questions to Consider’ and ‘Suggested Types of Evidence’ for each Principle. You can download the application PDF on our website.

<https://character.org/application-information/>

Please note: The PDF is for reference only. The actual application must be accessed and completed online.

Scoring Guide, Self-Assessment, and Scoresheet The scoring guide, self-assessment and self-tabulating score sheet are used by evaluators to measure a school’s implementation of the *11 Principles*. You can download these documents and use them to reflect on your progress.

<https://character.org/application-information/>

Writing your application

We encourage you to gather all the information you need prior to filling out the application online.

Please save copies of all your documents on your own computer. This helps you in case of technical issues, and it helps those who come after you find information. If you start an application online but do not submit it, your information will not be saved in our system.

Applicants will be asked to provide:

- A narrative of your school’s character journey, and, if reapplying or recertifying, how you’ve addressed previous feedback and what you have done for outreach (mentoring, evaluating etc.)
- Your school’s core values (character strengths; moral/performance/intellectual/civic--not outcomes, beliefs, mission or vision)
- Your school’s demographic data.
- A narrative of your school’s implementation of each of the *11 Principles*.
- Examples and artifacts that fully and clearly demonstrate implementation of each principle.
- 5 years of academic, behavioral, and school culture and climate data. (If you do not have data make sure you provide other evidence that shows your character initiative is working).
- Testimonials of stakeholders. (Teachers, non-teaching staff members, students, parents, and community members)

Completing and submitting your application

The information below is also provided on the application.

- Please make sure your primary contact and payment information is correct before selecting 'Start Application'. You will not be able to modify this information later.
- The application fee is \$250. (fees for districts vary). There is an additional \$25 administration fee for purchase orders. If paying by credit card, please provide the name of the person as it appears on the credit card. If paying by purchase order Character.org will send you an invoice after you submit your application.
- Please add the name of the school as it appears on your application.
- As you fill out your application, you can save your progress. We recommend you do so after each section/page you complete, and before you end a writing session.
- The application will 'timeout' if no activity is detected within 30 minutes. If the application times out before you save your progress, you may lose your uploads.
- Use all available uploads to help tell your school's story. Use different artifacts/evidence for each upload. Use artifacts that are the most compelling and that clearly demonstrate implementation of the principle.
- Artifacts need to be uploaded into your application as part of a PDF or Word document. We discourage you from using photos as evidence for Principles 1-11 as it is difficult for evaluators to know what is going on in a photo. Photos with captions may be included in the last section of the application.
- Uploads are saved when you see the filled in trashcan icon. Do not go to the next page until you see the icon.
- Videos may be used if they clearly demonstrate the principle in action. Copy and paste the URL link into your narrative field, and make sure the link works.
- In sections with a (+) sign, please enter your first response and select (+) to add any additional responses.
- Please provide 5 years of data for test scores, referrals, suspensions, and school culture and climate survey data. (If you do not have data, enter "n/a" or "yes/no" on the application and provide other evidence that shows your character initiative is working)
- Please make sure your stakeholders answer the question asked in the testimonial section of the application.
- Once you have filled out all sections of the application, select 'Preview Final Application' to receive a draft PDF of your application for your team to review. If you are happy with your application, select 'Approve Application'. You will be asked to confirm this selection. If you need to make changes after reviewing, select 'Revise Application' and log back into your account to continue to edit your application. After editing, select "Preview Final Application" to receive an updated PDF. Select 'Approve Application' when you are ready to submit your application.
- Your application is not complete until you have selected 'Approve Application' and either paid by credit card or selected payment by Purchase Order. Character.org will send you a receipt (credit card) or invoice (purchase order) within approximately 14 business days after you submit your application. Purchase orders are considered a promise of a payment and you may submit your application.
- Applications cannot be edited once submitted.
- You will receive an email confirmation that your application has been received.

Payment

You will receive a receipt (if you use a credit card) or an invoice (if you use a purchase order) from Character.org within approximately 14 business days after submitting your application. Purchase order payments do not need to be made until you receive an invoice from Character.org. Purchase orders are considered a promise of a payment and you may submit your application.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

When does the application open?

The 2025 application opens on our website in June, 2024.

When are applications due?

The 2025 application deadline is Friday, November 8, 2024 at 11:59pm EST.

When will I know if my school receives certification?

State Schools of Character are announced in late January, and National Schools of Character are announced in May.

How long do the certifications last?

Both State and National Schools of Character hold their designations for 5 years.

What if I miss the deadline?

We cannot accept applications for designation submitted after the deadline. We recommend you save a copy of all your documents and continue to work on your character initiative so you can apply the following fall. If you miss the deadline but want feedback on your application you may submit it as a mock audit which is open year-round. There is no designation with a mock audit. The fee for Mock Audits is \$250.

What is the fee to submit an application?

The fee for the state review is \$250. Fees vary for districts and charter networks. There is a \$25 processing fee for purchase orders. All fee information can be viewed [here](#).

How do I know if my school is ready to submit an application?

Becoming a School of Character is a process. Every school is different, but typically, character teams working to implement the *11 Principles* receive their certification in 3-5 years. Some schools require more time, some less.

Do I need to be a member of Character.org to submit an application?

You *do not* need to be a Character.org [member](#) to submit an application. Non- members will however, have to create an account. We ask that members and non-members [sign up to receive our free e-newsletter](#) as we are always disseminating useful information about character development and the *11 Principles*.

Should my school use a particular Character or SEL program?

Character.org does not endorse any particular program or approach. Schools can, and do, use a variety of teaching strategies, instructional practices, and curriculum resources. The *11 Principles* Framework is designed to help schools develop a comprehensive character initiative that best suits the needs of their students, staff, families and school community. Schools of Character are evaluated on their implementation of the *11 Principles*.

Should I purchase a NEW *11 Principles* Guidebook?

Yes! We recommend schools purchase at least one [guidebook](#) to have on hand for their team to reference as they implement the *11 Principles* and, should they choose, go through the application and review process.

Are there other resources I should have?

Schools may download a PDF of the School of Character application for their team to reference and use for staff development. The scoring guide, self-assessment, and self-tabulating score sheet may also be downloaded from the Character.org website. When used with the guidebook, these tools help schools determine where they are on their character journey, and give schools ideas about what they can do to strengthen their character initiative.

The scoring guide and self-assessment are used by reviewers when evaluating a school's implementation of the *11 Principles*. This information can be found at <https://character.org/application-information/>.

Are there examples I can look at?

Yes! You can hear National Schools of Character talk about their implementation here [11 Principles in Action](#).

Does Character.org provide professional development?

Yes! Character.org works directly with schools who want to deepen their understanding of the *11 Principles*. Contact Tamra Nast, our Director of Training and Coaching, for more information. She can be reached at tamra@character.org

Will my school be certified if we've been trained in the *11 Principles Framework*?

A school or district trained in *The 11 Principles Framework* cannot assume it will become a State or National School of Character. The training is designed to provide schools with a deeper understanding of the *11 Principles*. Each school and district are independently evaluated based on the strength of its School of Character application.

What if my school is not happy with our score?

The application and evaluation process are designed to support a school's growth. All evaluators are educators, trained by Character.org and each application is read by at least 2 evaluators. Character.org reads all reports. There is no appeal at the state level. Requests for an appeal at the national level should be sent to Character.org's Director of Schools of Character within 7 days of receiving the national report.

Is there a celebration at the state level?

All schools and districts achieving state certification will be listed by name on our website and receive a digital state badge/logo that can be used on their school materials. Schools receiving certification may purchase banners from Character.org to display at their school. State Coordinators and state affiliate sponsors work with schools to plan local recognition events.

Is there a national celebration?

National Schools and Districts of Character are listed by name and photo on our website and celebrated and recognized at Character.org's annual [Forum](#). All schools receiving national certification receive a digital certificate and digital national badge/logo that can be used on their school materials. National School and National District of Character banners may be purchased from Character.org for schools and districts to display.