

National and State Schools of Character

Guidelines for Preparing to Apply in 2012



NATIONAL SCHOOLS
OF CHARACTER



STATE SCHOOLS
OF CHARACTER

Sponsored by the Character Education Partnership and
Participating State Schools of Character Sponsors

NOTE TO 2012 APPLICANTS

CEP is currently making significant website improvements which will impact the NSOC application process. **The 2012 application will be entirely online.** CEP recommends that schools and districts prepare to apply by reviewing and gathering the following information.

OVERVIEW

The Schools of Character Program: A Path to Excellence

The National and State Schools of Character program is a school improvement process which offers the opportunity for self-assessment and expert feedback to schools and districts engaged in character education. CEP will name ALL schools and district applicants that demonstrate an exemplary level of implementation of CEP's *11 Principles of Effective Character Education* as National Schools of Character (NSOC). Applicants that are not named NSOC in 2012 will receive feedback and assistance to help them develop an action plan for improvement that will enable them to attain NSOC designation in the future.

NSOC: Leaders in Character Education

CEP showcases the National Schools of Character (NSOC) in an annual publication and on its website. NSOC receive press coverage and have the right to use the NSOC name and logo. CEP honors the NSOC at its annual National Forum on Character Education, and the NSOC receive a grant to help with outreach.

NSOC winners serve as models and ambassadors of effective character education. They share their successful strategies with other educators at the National Forum and their home sites. They open their campuses as demonstration sites and contribute to CEP's communication network.

State Schools of Character

State sponsors in many states name State Schools of Character (SSOC) as a prerequisite to being forwarded to CEP for consideration as NSOC. State sponsors recognize SSOC at state celebrations in their honor. SSOC serve as models within their states where they share best practices and develop a state-level mentoring network. CEP recognizes SSOC winners in its annual NSOC book. CEP and state sponsors also honor SSOC on their websites.

SSOC hold their designation for three years. Being named an SSOC qualifies an applicant to be considered for at the national level for NSOC status. State sponsors offer technical assistance or guide applicants to helpful resources so that SSOC winners can reach the goal of becoming a National School or District of Character.

A Continuous Improvement Process

The application process is a rich opportunity to conduct a thorough self-assessment. In addition, all applicants receive a quantitative score sheet and written feedback to guide self-reflection, study, and growth.

Call (1-800) 988-8081 or (202) 296-7743 for further information.

These application guidelines are available on the CEP website at www.character.org/nsoc.



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“As we worked on the NSOC application, we realized the ‘winning’ was the process itself. Applying afforded us the opportunity to appreciate our strengths and work on our challenges.” ~Nan Peterson, director of service learning, The Blake School

Eligibility

CEP recommends that applicants have been engaged in character education for at least one school year but any K-12 school or district in the United States is eligible to apply. Past NSOC can apply again after five years, making those named in 2007 or earlier eligible. Schools and districts from outside the U.S. are welcome to apply for Promising Practices.

Scoring Criteria

CEP and state reviewers screen applications using CEP’s 2010 revised [11 Principles of Effective Character Education](#). Visit www.character.org for more information about this framework for school success.

PREPARING TO APPLY: SELF-ASSESSMENT AND DATA GATHERING

CEP recommends schools and districts interested in engaging in the NSOC process begin by conducting the following self-assessments. These should be done at least once per year in order to measure the growth and impact of the character initiative and help school leaders determine priorities and next steps.

School Climate

Conduct a **climate survey** of students, staff, and parents. Visit the CEP website for samples and resources.

Stakeholder Self-Assessment

Assemble a group of knowledgeable stakeholders that includes staff, parents, and students (if appropriate). This group can be an existing leadership group such as a school improvement team or character education committee or it can be specially formed to lead the school or district through the NSOC application process. The stakeholder group should **assess your school or district’s character education initiative using the revised 11 Principles of Effective Character Education**. Visit the CEP website for resources to help applicants through this process. If your school or district community has not yet selected core values, this group should determine a process for doing so and begin that process.

Student Impact

Gather data on attendance, disciplinary referrals and infractions, suspensions, state test scores and AYP or other measures of academic achievement, and graduation rates (if applicable).

PREPARING TO COMPLETE THE APPLICATION

Applicants are strongly encouraged to attend a state workshop, participate in a CEP webinar, or view other online resources on the application process. Visit www.character.org for details.

Narrative and Supporting Evidence

You will be asked to explain how your character education initiative exemplifies the 11 Principles. Brainstorm responses to the following questions.

1. What are your character education goals?

Define your school’s (or district’s) view of character education and the values your school community has agreed upon. Describe your philosophical approach, and explain what your character education initiative is trying to accomplish. Explain why you are doing what you are doing. Citing the texts, publications, or experts that have influenced your initiative helps evaluators understand your philosophy.

2. What is special about your school or district? In what ways is your school or district a model for others?

Explain what is special about your accomplishments in character education. What feature of your initiative would CEP want to hold up as a model of exemplary implementation of the 11 Principles?

3. How are you implementing character education?

Describe your accomplishments in each of the 11 Principles. Note that each principle has three or four “scoring items.” Include specific, illustrative examples and insert artifacts that address the scoring items. **Keep in mind that to receive a score of 4 on an item, you must show evidence of all the key indicators of exemplary practice described under each scoring item.** Look at the 11 Principles document or visit CEP’s website for more information.

Supporting Evidence

Gather artifacts that amplify and support your claims.

Examples include:

- Data on positive behavioral or academic change
- School climate survey results
- Mission statements and school mottos
- Examples of student work or student reflections
- Lesson plans or assignments that integrate character education into the curriculum
- Documentation of staff development

Student Data

Principle 11 is your opportunity to make a persuasive case that your school (or district) has thoughtfully implemented character education. To demonstrate positive and significant results, be prepared to provide specific *qualitative* and *quantitative* evidence such as full data and analysis from climate surveys and other measurements. Plan to use numbers, not percentages, when reporting changes in student behavior (such as referrals or suspensions). Your narrative and supporting artifacts should clearly demonstrate that your community has gathered data, reflected upon it, and then acted as needed.

Self-Assessment

Your stakeholder group should also have completed an assessment of your character education initiative using the revised *11 Principles of Effective Character Education*. Use the scoresheet on CEP's website to calculate compiled scores and include the other data gathered during the self-assessment process. You will be asked to enter these scores during the online application process.

Additional Tips

- If your school or district has previously applied, include and identify the changes that you have made since the last application in your narrative.
- If you see your school or district as a leader in helping others schools with their character education efforts or if you have outreach plans, describe your leadership efforts in Principle 9.
- If you are using a commercial program as part of your initiative, include a brief explanation of the program. Don't assume evaluators are necessarily familiar with it.
- Be aware that evaluators may look at your website to see whether it reflects your character education initiative.

SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION

Check the CEP website for updates. Applications are due December 1, 2011.

Please note that all NSOC/SSOC applications become the property of CEP and may be used for training, promotional, or educational purposes.

Changes to the 2012 Application

The 2012 application is very similar to the 2011 application except that all parts of the application must be entered and submitted online, rather than printed and mailed or sent as a .pdf by e-mail.

Applicants will be asked to enter

- Basic information about their school or district
- Narrative and portfolio evidence of how they are implementing each of the 11 Principles
- Average scores from their stakeholder group's 11 Principles self-assessment.

Recommended Application Strategies

Applicants are encouraged to compose and save their narrative responses using a word processing program and then "cut and paste" from their saved documents directly into the online application. This strategy can save hours of distress should an unlikely technical error occur. Similarly, applicants are encouraged to create separate "portfolio" documents for each of the 11 Principles before completing the application online so that they can easily upload them. Note that portfolio evidence can no longer be imbedded in the narrative text but must be uploaded separately.

AFTER SUBMISSION

Application Review Timeline

From December to January, state sponsors and CEP staff review the applications. In January, state sponsors send status letters to all state applicants and forward the applications of their SSOC winners to CEP. In late February, CEP selects the National Finalists. Finalists will be asked to submit additional supporting evidence online. In March, CEP notifies state nominees and applicants from non-participating states of their status. In March and April, CEP reviews applications and gathers other data through a variety of strategies, such as telephone interviews, the applicant's website, or site visits. In May, CEP announces the National Schools of Character.

Feedback and Reflection

All SSOC/NSOC applicants will receive feedback on their applications either from their state sponsors or CEP.

Applicants are encouraged to reflect on this feedback, ask their state coordinators or CEP staff if they have questions, and begin to plan next steps in their stakeholder or other leadership groups. State coordinators will provide resources and technical assistance to those schools and districts named SSOC that are not named NSOC in order to help them achieve NSOC status in the future.

Promising Practices

CEP gives annual Promising Practices in character education for unique, specific, and effective character education practices and strategies that exemplify one or more of the 11 Principles. Selected schools and districts receive a certificate of recognition at the Promising Practices ceremony at the CEP Forum. In addition, descriptions of the winning practices appear in the annual NSOC publication as well as on CEP's website where educators may search the practices for ideas.

CEP gives all SSOC/NSOC applicants an extended deadline to apply for a PP for a specific activity or strategy described in their application. In addition, their PP applications receive special consideration.

Staff Development

As schools and districts engaged in school improvement through character education, CEP encourages all SSOC/NSOC and Promising Practices applicants to attend the CEP's National Forum in November. Educators who attend the Forum benefit from outstanding breakout sessions, inspiring expert speakers, and networking opportunities. They learn concrete, effective character education strategies and return to their schools motivated and prepared to implement them.

CEP also encourages educators to visit www.character.org frequently for resources, professional development opportunities, information on upcoming webinars, and opportunities to participate in a growing online community of character educators.

Leadership and Outreach

The NSOC path to excellence does not stop with being named an NSOC. CEP encourages educators from National Schools of Character to share their expertise with others through outreach sessions, inservices, mentoring relationships, and social networking.

2012 STATE SPONSORS

California—Character Development Center at the University of San Diego
Colorado—Foundation for Character Development
Florida—The Golden Rule Foundation
Georgia—Pioneer RESA
Illinois—In transition
Indiana—Indiana Department of Education
Iowa—Institute for Character Development at Drake University / Character Counts in Iowa
Kansas—Kansas State Department of Education
Kentucky—Character Council of Greater Cincinnati & Northern Kentucky
Louisiana—LSU AgCenter 4-H Development
Maryland—Maryland Center for Character Education at Stevenson University
Massachusetts—Hudson Public School District, the Center for Character and Social Responsibility at Boston University
Michigan—Michigan Department of Education
Minnesota—Synergy & Leadership Exchange; Minnesota Department of Education
Missouri—CHARACTERplus; St. Louis Rams
New Hampshire—Ethics Institute at Dartmouth College
New Jersey—New Jersey Alliance for Social, Emotional and Character Development
New York—Academy for Character Education at the Sage Colleges
North Carolina—North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
Ohio—Ohio Partners in Character Education, Ohio Dept. of Education, and Ohio Better Business Bureaus
Oklahoma—Character Council of Central Oklahoma
Pennsylvania—DeSales University
South Carolina—Palmetto Character Council
South Dakota—South Dakota 4-H (pending)
Texas—Texas Elementary Principals & Supervisors Association
Utah—The Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Center for Community of Caring at the University of Utah
Virginia—School of Education at Regent University
Washington—Leadership Innovations Team, Whitworth University, and Washington State ASCD
West Virginia—College of Education and Human Services at Marshall University
Wisconsin—Wisconsin Character Education Partnership – www.wicharacter.org