

Tips on Applying for a 2025 State/ National School of Character

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character.org

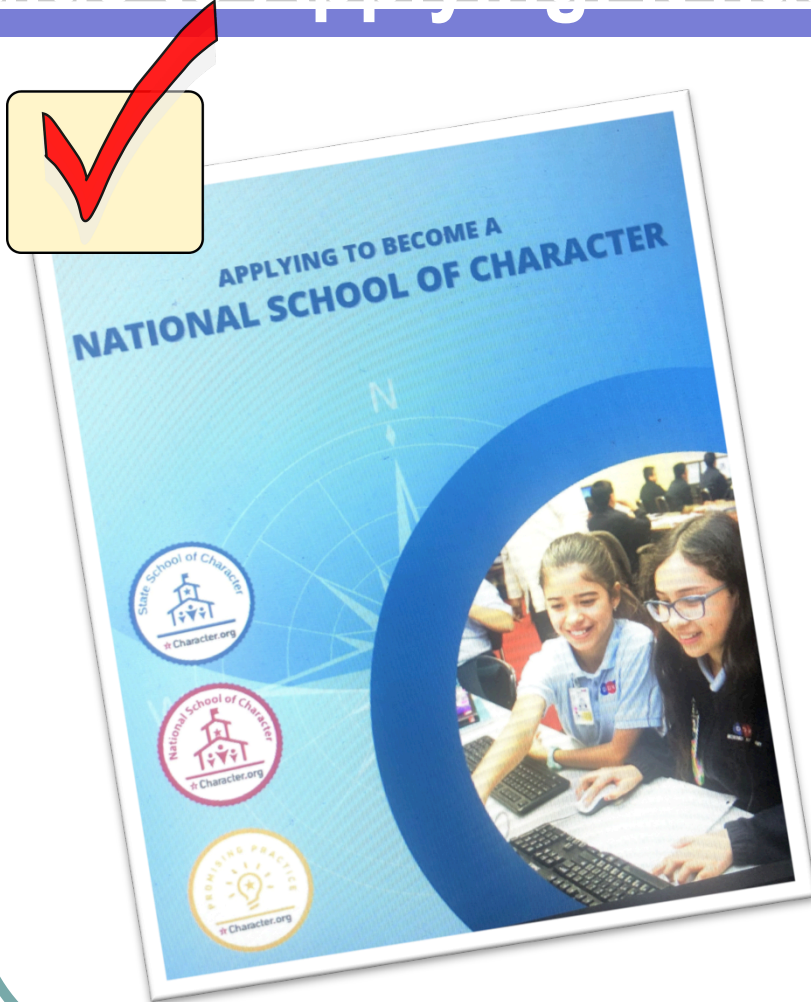


Aim to UNDERSTAND the Big Three.

- **Understand the Application.** Go to <https://character.org/schools-of-character-intro/>.
- **Understand the 11 Principles.** Our review summarizes the main points of the newly revised Principles.
- **Understand the Scoring.** Each Principle narrative is scored from 1 to 4. You need an average of 3.3 (no 2's if possible, please).



**Make sure you download the Character.org
Guide to Applying: It has ALL the information**



***Applying to Become a
National School of
Character*** (links to all
SOC materials are
provided in the guide):

Guide to Apply

**This free guide
gives all the
details.**



Understand the Application



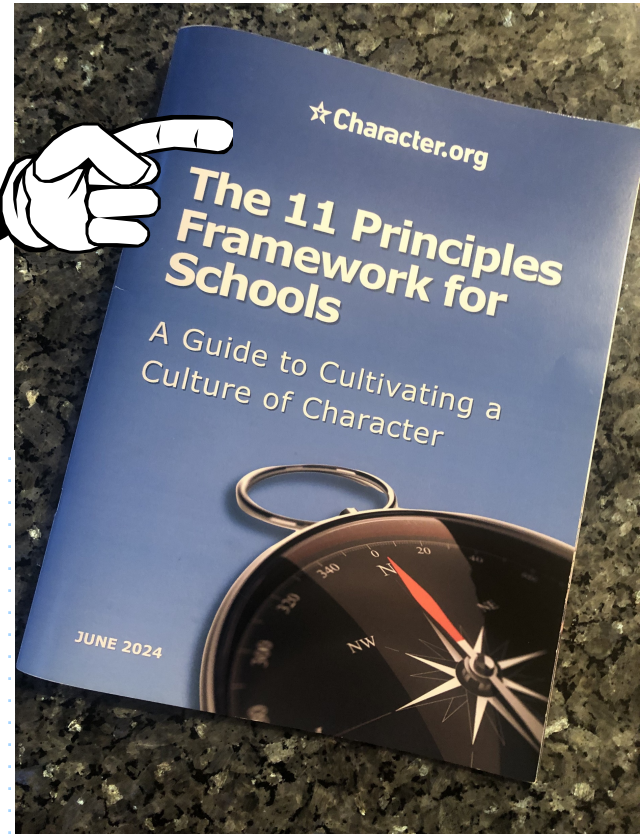
The application has 5 parts. You must provide information for each part. However, the narratives for each Principle & accompanying evidence are the basis for your score.

This is the year of BIG CHANGES: UNDERSTAND the Application BEFORE you start!



Before you start your application, go to:

<https://character.org/schools-of-character-intro/>. A host of materials awaits you, whether you are just starting or already on your journey.



Available for purchase
on website

Self-Assessment /Scoring Guide, used by both your school & Character.org to evaluate.

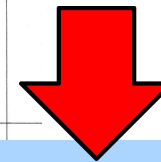
2025 11 Principles SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL: SCHOOL:

State:

4-Exemplary 3-Good 2-Developing 1-Lacking Evidence

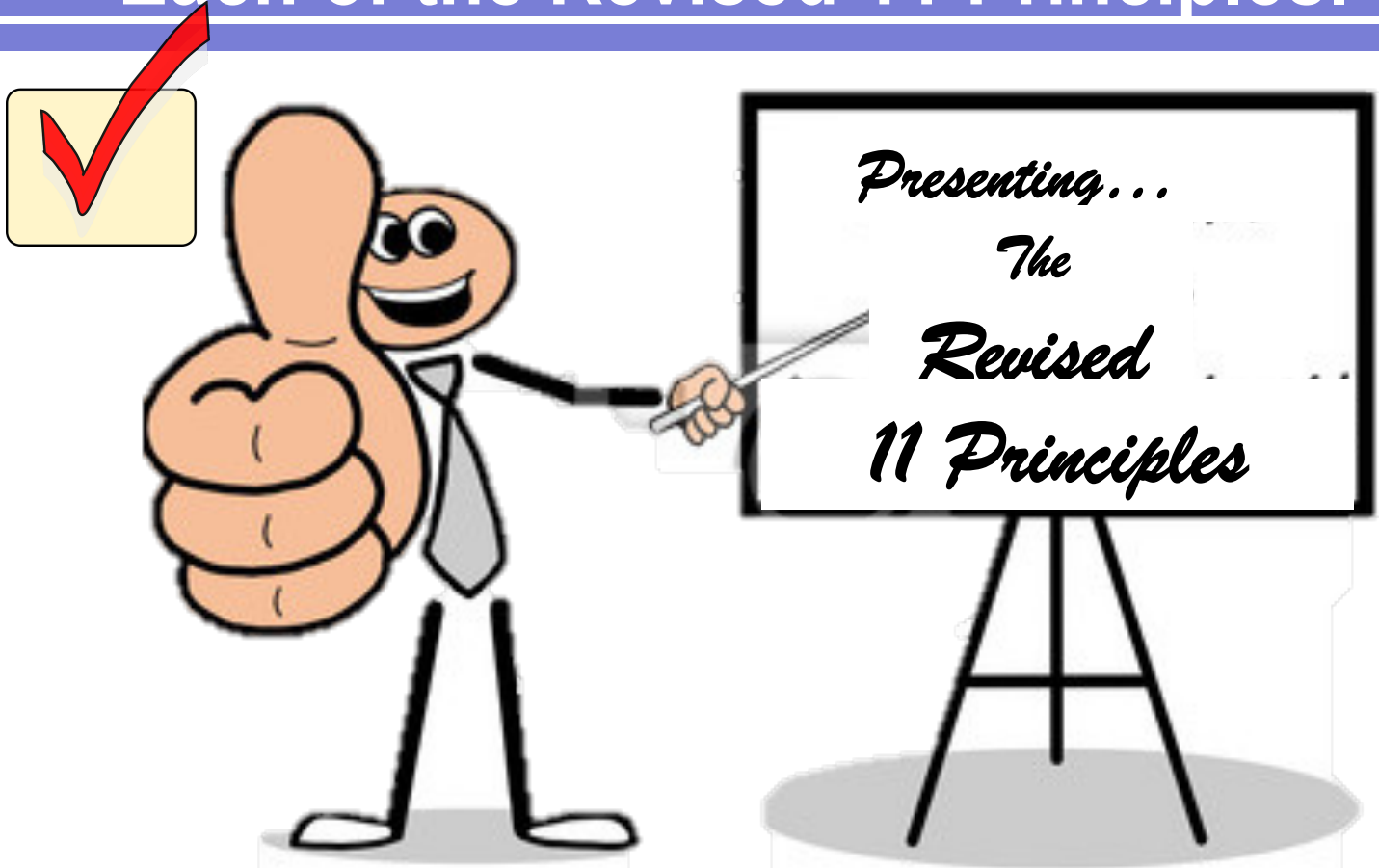
Principle:	Key Indicator and Examples 1	Key Indicator and Examples 2	Key Indicator and Examples 3	Key Indicator and Examples 4
1. A set of core values is selected, defined, embedded, and modeled throughout your school culture.	1.1: School stakeholders intentionally consider, select, and affirm (or reaffirm) your school's core values. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open and Transparent/all involved in selecting. Ensure current relevance of core values A balance of moral/performance/ intellectual/civic character. Defined in behavioral terms; "looks like"; character strengths, not an outcome. 	1.2: The core values inspire, guide, and inform every aspect of school life. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students, staff, and parents use and share a common language. All staff feel responsible to model, teach (clarify through instruction), and embed the core values throughout day. Embedded in school policies and procedures Shape hiring practices, new staff, training, new student/family orientation, etc. 	1.3: Reminders and statements of your school's core values are visible throughout the school community. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In mission statement, handbooks, discipline, school goals, everywhere. Staff, students, parents can identify/explain touchstone, mantras, school creed, etc. Core values are communicated in observable behaviors. Artifacts show that core values are the heartbeat of the school. 	
2. The school develops and implements an intentional, proactive, and comprehensive approach that embeds character everywhere.	2.1 The school has an intentional process to critically reflect and discuss how everything in school influences the culture. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School leaders can explain in narrative form the school's character development strengths and challenges. School leaders can explain how they identify and assess the "hidden curriculum." (see guidebook for more information). 	2.2 The school creates a written comprehensive plan that includes specific character development goals & expectations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The core values have been infused into all aspects of the school day. Teachers can explain how core values/ character strengths are embedded into academic and non-academic areas. Annual goals for the school's character initiative have been established. 	2.3 The school looks for new practices and approaches to grow character initiative. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School leaders can explain in narrative form how their character development plan is a proactive process of continuous improvement and growth. Staff meets regularly to reflect on different ways to model the core values. Time for staff to discuss core value integration. Staff discuss reaching all students, whether all activities are developmentally appropriate, etc. 	2.4 The school is intentional and proactive in addressing social, emotional, & character development. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A research-based approach is used to teach SEL skills to all students. PD for staff re: SEL School stakeholders can show how SEL skills are embedded.
3. Every student understands, cares about, and practices the core values embedded in the school community.	3.1 Staff provides multiple opportunities for students to understand and apply the school's core values. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff explain how they teach/provide opportunities for students to understand the core values & how they are applied daily. Students can explain each core value, the importance and application to their lives. Students can explain how all stakeholders model core values. 	3.2 The school identifies ways to encourage students to reflect upon, internalize, and make a positive and sustained commitment to live their core values. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students take ownership of own character growth; staff/students can explain. Time is provided for student reflection on character growth. (goal-setting, journaling, etc.) Students explain which core values/character strength they want to improve and why. 	3.3 The school provides opportunities for students to practice the core values become consistent habits of mind choices. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students can explain how they live values in the context of classroom relationships, sports, real-life situations. Staff and students can explain how positive and constructive feedback 	
4. The school creates a caring community where everyone feels they belong.	4.1 The school fosters caring relationships between students and staff. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intentional strategies & practices are used to promote positive relationships. Students feel understood, heard, & valued. Every student has an adult to go to for any reason, (does not have to be teacher). Discipline prioritizes restoring positive relationships. Every student feels safe & connected to what the school stands for & believes. 	4.2 The school helps students form caring relationships with each other. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intentional strategies & practices used to foster student connection, develop empathy & sense of responsibility for others. Artifacts show all students perceive the student body as friendly, inclusive, & supportive. Practices & strategies are used to foster caring/respect (ex. class meetings, cross-age groups, peer mentoring etc.) 	4.3 School leaders foster caring relationships between all staff members and b parents. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intentional strategies & practices promote positive relationship Parents report feeling welcomed Staff report positive climate a who support each other. School leaders model caring relationships Artifacts show all staff feel valued. PD is offered about building relationships 	
5. The school provides students with opportunities to share their voice.	5.1 Opportunities for all students to participate in Service Learning that's connected to the curriculum. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service Learning is used as an instructional/teaching strategy. Projects connect service with curriculum & academic content standards. Students assess community needs, take action, plan, reflection about project growth, share project with 	5.2 Opportunities for all students to participate in Community Service projects. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school has established expectations for community service both inside and outside of school. Community Service projects are developmentally appropriate. Students understand the meaning and purpose of the project. 	5.3 Each student is equipped with the skills to practice academic integrity. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school has implemented a comprehensive approach to academic integrity. Developmentally appropriate strategies and practices used. Students respond appropriately when faced with pressure to lie, steal, or cheat. Students can explain how being honest and a person of integrity is important. Students report honesty and integrity are promoted and modeled by staff. 	5.4 The school equips each student to stand up to peer mistreatment. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school has put in place intentional strategies, activities, & practices to promote respect, understanding, & peace among students. Steps are taught to stop peer mistreatment. Students report staff actively address peer mistreatment.

Click on this link and download the Self-Assessment Guide.



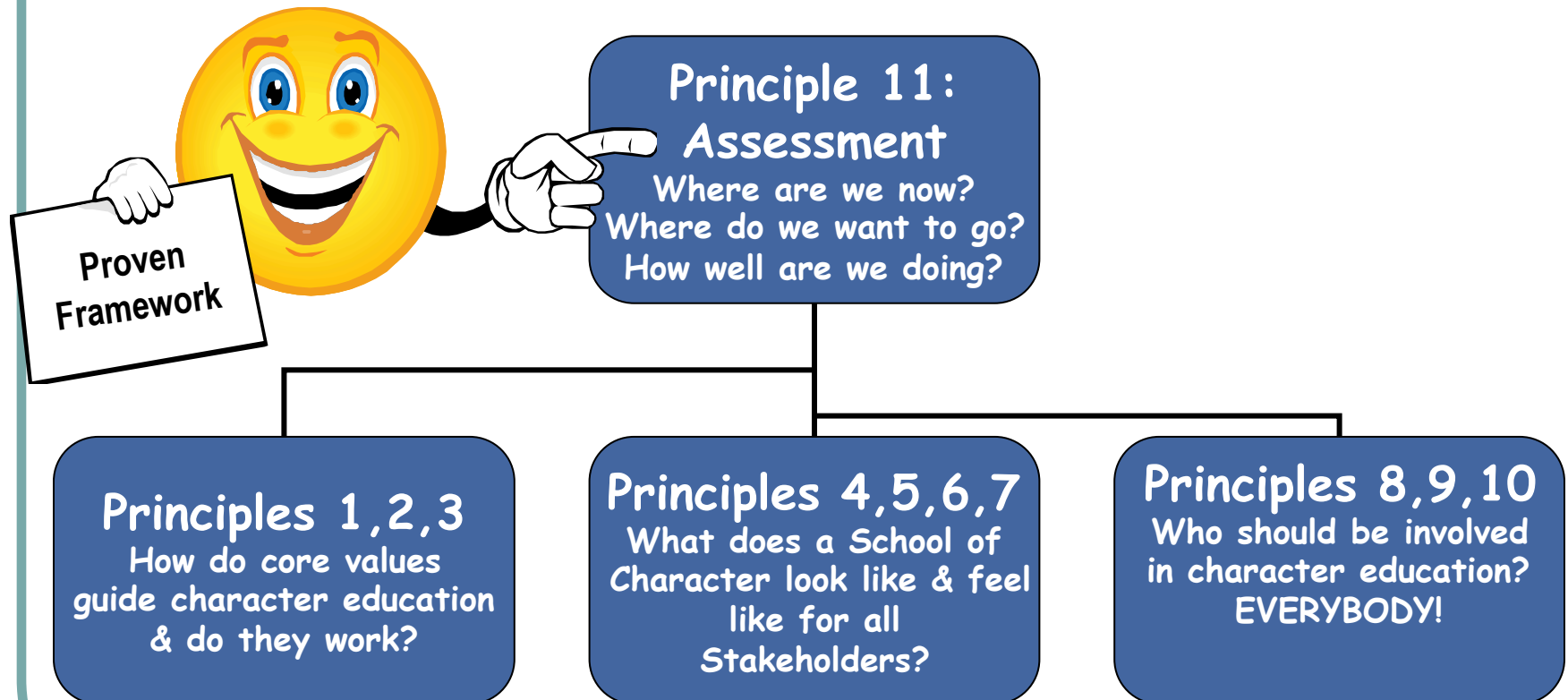
<https://character.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/2025-Scoring-Guide-and-Self-Assessment.pdf>

The Basis for Scoring: Your Narratives on Each of the Revised 11 Principles.

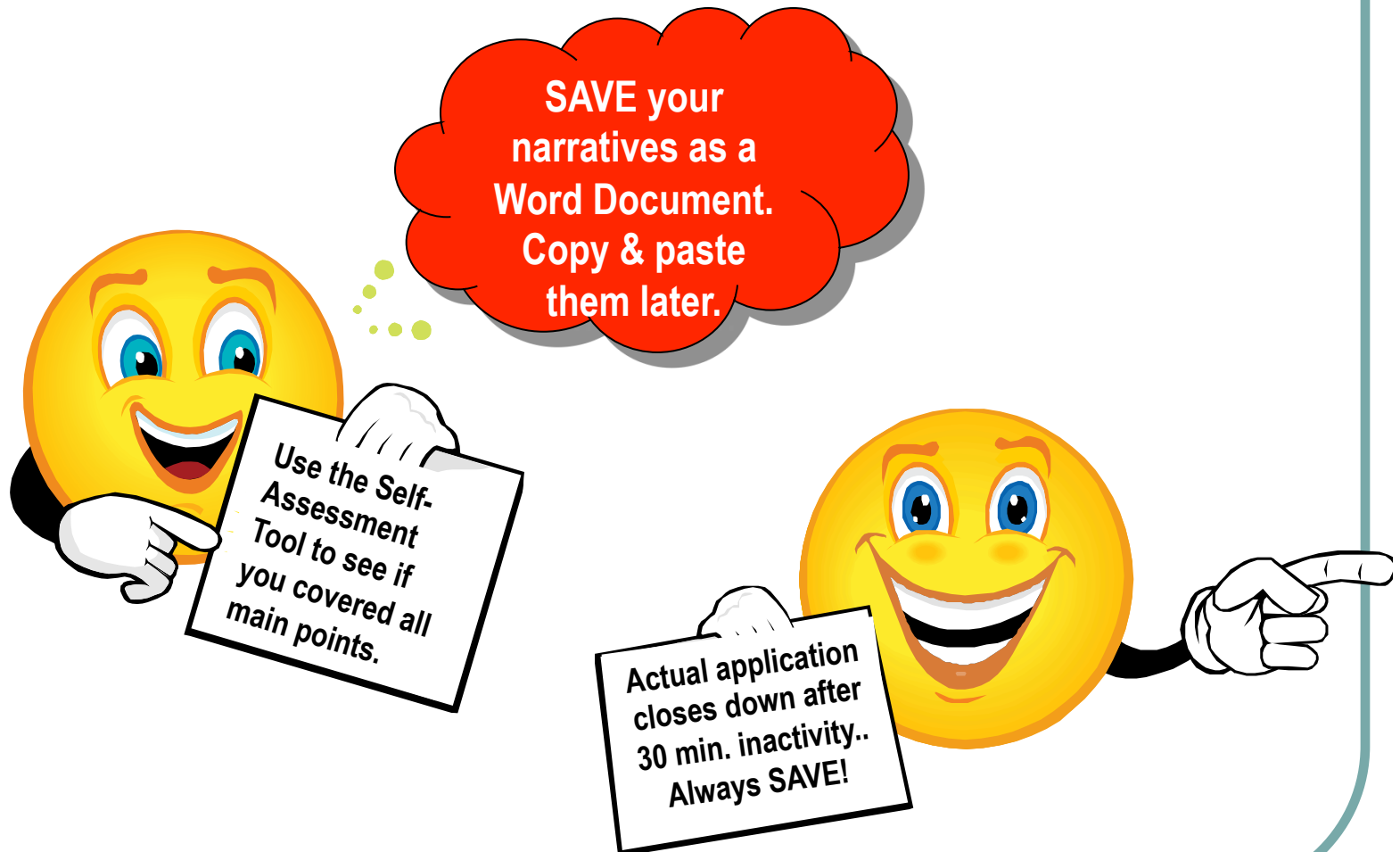


Your score is the average of 11 scores you receive for your narrative responses to each of the 11 Principles, replete with accompanying evidence.

Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education: An Overall View



TIPS before we review each Principle



P. 1 A set of core values is selected, defined, embedded, modeled throughout your school culture.

1.1 Core Values (CV): Select/Affirm (4 Domains: Moral, Performance, Intellectual, Civic)



1.2 CV inspire, guide, inform every aspect of school life

1.3 Reminders, statements of school's core values are visible throughout the school.



Pemberton's Core Values (SERVICE, PERSEVERANCE, INTEGRITY, RESPECT, RESPONSIBILITY), chosen by all stakeholders in the district, proved to be the glue that kept student & staff together at Denbo-Crichton School when it was created at the height of the pandemic from three schools.

P.2 Develops, implements an intentional, proactive, comprehensive approach, embedding character everywhere

2.1 School has an intentional process to critically reflect & discuss how everything in school influences the culture.

2.2 School creates a written comprehensive plan including specific character development goals & expectations.

2.3 School looks for new character practices, approaches

2.4 Intentional, proactive in addressing SEL skills



With the increase of anxiety & need for resilience after the pandemic, Greenwood School in Hamilton had PD in Character Strong, research-backed curricula/training to boost belonging, well-being, and engagement for students and staff



P. 3: Every student understands, cares about, practices the core values embedded in the school community¹²

3.1 Multiple opportunities for students to understand, apply the school's core values.

3.2 School identifies ways for students to internalize, make sustained commitment to CV

3.3 Opportunities for students to practice the CV so they become habits of mind, heart & choice.



Helen A. Fort Middle School has 6 student speakers at the promotion ceremony, each choosing one core value that impacted his or her life.

P. 4 School creates a caring community where everyone feels they belong.



4.1 Fosters caring relationships between students & staff.

4.2 Helps students form caring relationships with each other

4.3 School Leaders foster caring relationships between all staff members & between staff & parents.

Dr. Charles C. Polk Elementary School uses practices such as 7 Habits of Happy Kids, Scholar Ambassadors, Box out Bullying, Grief & Loss initiatives & Kind Hearts assemblies to demonstrate its belief that “building relationships is the stepping stone for teaching & development.”



P5: Provides students with opportunities to shape and form their moral compass.

- 5.1 Opportunities for all students to participate in Service Learning that's connected to the curriculum**
- 5.2 Opportunities for all to participate in Community Service.**
- 5.3 Students have skills to practice academic integrity.**
- 5.4 Students learn how to stand up to peer mistreatment.**



Hanover Park Regional High School District, recertified twice as a National District of Character, has a very extensive description of its completed service-learning projects on its website. Go to: <https://www.hpreg.org/page/service-learning>

P. 6: Meaningful, Challenging Academic Curriculum that encourages all students to develop their character strengths.

6.1 Develops a comprehensive plan to infuse character into the academic curriculum, across all subject areas.

6.2 Staff emphasizes, reinforces performance character

6.3 Staff emphasizes, reinforces intellectual character

6.4 Challenges all students' learning needs



Pauline Petway School in Vineland, twice recognized as a National School of Character, has raised the aspirations of its diverse student body by accenting performance & intellectual character.

P.7: Fosters character by encouraging students to “do the right thing” for intrinsic rather than extrinsic reasons

7.1 Staff exchange ideas on practices to help students develop/ internalize their moral compass

7.2 Student behaviors/mistakes serve as opportunities to teach, reinforce character development.

7.3 All students empowered to have a voice in school’s character initiative



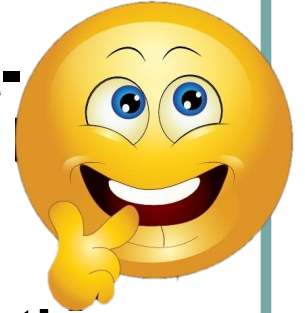
Unity Charter School in Morristown has motivated its students to initiate many projects on their own to improve the environment. The General Assembly, a unique aspect of the school, allows parents, teachers, board members and students to play a role in actual school governance.

P. 8: School embraces shared leadership as a critical path to deepening its ¹⁷

8.1 Leadership demonstrates a sustained commitment to the school's character initiative

8.2 Leadership Team—teachers, staff, students, parents design, implement assess character initiative.

8.3 Students assume leadership roles that contribute to the character initiative.



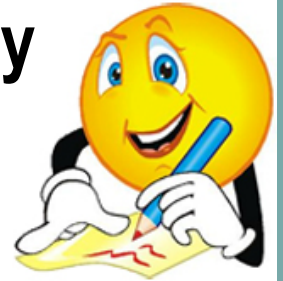
Dover Middle School strives to shape its students as transformational leaders. Its National Junior Honor Society researched and presented a service project for Mental Health Awareness Month to teach both students and teachers healthy coping strategies when faced with stress and anxiety.

P. 9: All staff share responsibility to implement and reinforce the school's character initiative.

9.1 All staff encouraged to be involved in planning, designing, implementing school's character initiative.

9.2 Staff commits to finding ways to intentionally model the four domains of character.

9.3 Staff members intentionally reflect on their own character & growth



Old Bridge Township Public Schools, whose 15 schools are National Schools of Character, has excellent CE training for all. New staff are welcomed via interviews, summer trainings, New Teacher Orientation and ongoing frontline training.

P. 10: Families & community are integral partners in the school's character initiative.

19

10.1 Families are involved in the character initiative.

10.2 School communicates with parents (caregivers) about character initiative, seeks their input.

10.3 School develops a “community of character” involving different community stakeholders



James A. McDivitt Elementary School in Old Bridge has close bonds with the larger community. Its K-Kids Group researches community needs and the school works actively with multiple organizations such as the Municipal Alliance, senior center, and the American Legion on service projects

P.11: Annually assesses the progress of its character initiative & makes changes.

20



11.1 Core values are reviewed on an annual basis so each core value can be reaffirmed or revised as needed.

11.2 The school uses a variety of methods to measure and assess its character initiative.

11.3 The school has an action plan for each academic year that includes specific year-long goals/ objectives.

11.4 Assesses if staff/students are aligning actions & choices with CV& other character strengths



Terence Reilly School 7 in Elizabeth uses multiple data – surveys, focus groups, state assessments, HIB reports, student exit reports, attendance stats – to monitor progress & plan next steps.

4 Tips for Narrative Writing



- Make a list of Effective Practices that address the bulleted items BEFORE you start to write. Keep the Self-Assessment handy.
- Buttress each general statement with **SPECIFIC EXAMPLES**, often giving three or more in one sentence.
- To conserve characters, use abbreviations, “&” for “and”; just one space between sentences.
- Double check your narrative vs. the Self-Assessment Tool to make certain you covered ALL scoring items. Take a word count!

Portfolio Evidence

All Portfolio documents submitted in PDF or Word Format. Document (not longer than 3 pages) must be READABLE & RELEVANT.

- All Principles now get up to **2** documents.
- **Principle 11** gets up to **4** documents.
- **NO** Photos/Collages
- May submit one additional piece of evidence by checking box and submitting (May be a video).



Suggestions: Letters on CE from Principal; flyers; CE agenda; lesson plan; service-learning project; student reflection; SEL competencies; local news article; school climate survey result; attendance; academic growth stats, charts; staff, student self-assessment on character growth

LABEL DOCUMENTS ON TOP FOR CLARITY!

Understand the Scoring Process

**National Schools of Character
Score Sheet**

School/District: _____
Reviewer #: _____

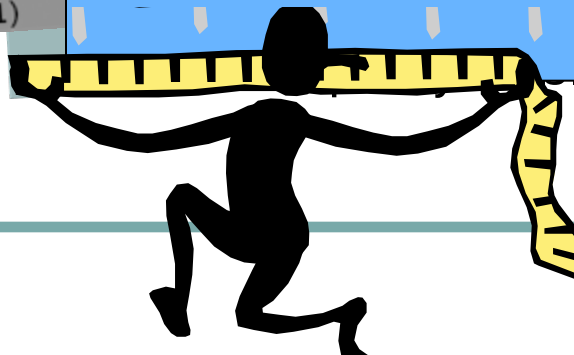
	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3
Principle #1			
Principle #2			
Principle #3			
Principle #4			
Principle #5			
Principle #6			
Principle #7			
Principle #8			
Principle #9			
Principle #10			
Principle #11			
Total (average of each line divided by 11)			

**3.3 for
State School
of Character**

**2.7 for
Honorable
Mention**

NOTE: Items are scored from 1 to 4.
Use the key indicators of exemplary
practice as a guide:

- 1 Lacking evidence**
- 2 Developing implementation**
- 3 Good implementation**
- 4 Exemplary implementation**



Applying for a NJSOC, National School of Character: Deadline-Nov. 8, 2024



- **SAME Application for State & National.**
- **Scoring based on: The revised 11 Principles of Effective Character Education**
- **Each Unit of the Narrative** for each Principle scored from **1 to 4**. If your total score is **3.3** with no unit average less than 3, you become a NJ School of Character.
- Invited to try for **National School/District of Character accreditation** – additional \$250 fee required for Schools; Districts pay \$500+, depending on the number of schools.

STOP: Additional Directions for Districts and Recertifications.



District & Recertification Applicants: Be aware of Additional Requirements

DISTRICTS

In addition to covering the bulleted items in narratives, districts must have 51% of schools, including HS, must certified as State/National SOC; give evidence of leadership, character strategic planning, character monetary/ human resources, training, assessment, data collection, outreach for character

RECERTIFICATIONS

In addition to covering the bulleted items in their narratives, they must show how they've grown, done outreach, kept some processes, changed others (and why), the impact of their work through data for 5 years.



How Evaluators Score Your Application

- They read the narrative for each Principle.
- They check to see if you have addressed the examples (the bulleted item) for each Key Indicator (Top Column).
- They check artifacts supporting them.
- They assign a score for each Scoring Item from 1 to 4.
- The tabulating sheet averages each Principle's score and the Final Score.



Check your work, fill in the Actual Application, & wait for the phone call



Need Help?

- We can provide a mentor school to guide you through the process courtesy of Regional Networking Centers.
- Reach out to **NJASECD** with any questions by emailing us at:

njasecd@gmail.com

