

# Tips on Applying for a State/National School of Character Certification

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**character.org**

# What are the Three BIG U's?

**Understand the Application.** Go to [www.character.org](http://www.character.org). Click on Programs/Schools of Character, then click on “Preview the Application.”

**Understand the Scoring.**

Each Principle narrative is scored from 1 to 4. You need an average of 3.3 (no 2's, please).

**Understand the 11 Principles.**

Our quick review summarizes the main points.



# 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.

# Before you start, download:

## **Guide to Applying for School and District of Character**

Please download and save this document for future reference.

## **Self-Assessment Tool and Scoring Guide**

Applicants as well as evaluators use this same scoring guide when assessing your school's implementation of the *11 Principles*

[Download Self-Assessment Tool and Scoring Guide](#)

[Download Self-Tabulating Score Sheet](#)

## [Download a Copy of \*11 Principles\*](#)

# UNDERSTAND THE APPLICATION



PART

CONTENT

*(Red type signifies written narrative)*

1

**General Contact Information;**

Also indicate if you wish to be Recertified.

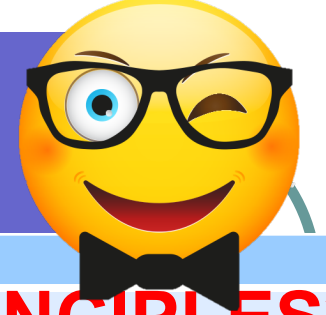
2

**Your Character Journey: **Compelling Overview**** (600 WORDS – NOT scored); Core Values; 3 Resources; Info on Forum; Recertified? Current NJSOC?

3

**Self-Assessment:** This is tricky. You need at least 6 folks to score your school/district on the 11 Prin. Follow the directions about sending folks the link as well as scoring guide.

# Understand the Application



&

CONTENT

3

**NARRATIVES ON EACH OF THE 11 PRINCIPLES\*:  
2500 characters each. Save as Word documents.  
\*ONLY NARRATIVES/EVIDENCE ARE SCORED!  
EVIDENCE: All Principles now get 2 artifacts each;  
Principle 11 gets 4. (Do NOT use photos as artifacts)**

- Additional Video or Flyer, ppt, etc. Optional

4

**Evidence of Impact:** State Tests (LA, Math);  
Attendance; Suspensions; Survey Questions on  
School Climate, Bullying, Surveys effecting Change

5

**Supporting Evidence:** 5 Photos with explanation;  
Testimonials – teacher, non-teaching staff; student,  
parent, community member; Promising Practices

**\*Begin filling in the Actual Application only after you have all this material completed.**

# Applying for a NJSOC, National School of Character: Deadline Nov. 23, 2023



- **SAME Application for State & National.**
- **Scoring based on:** *11 Principles of Effective Character Education*
- **Each Unit of the Narrative** for each Principle scored from **1 to 4. 600 WORDS limit**
- 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.

# Understand the Scoring Process

**National Schools of Character  
Score Sheet**

School/District:  
Reviewer #:

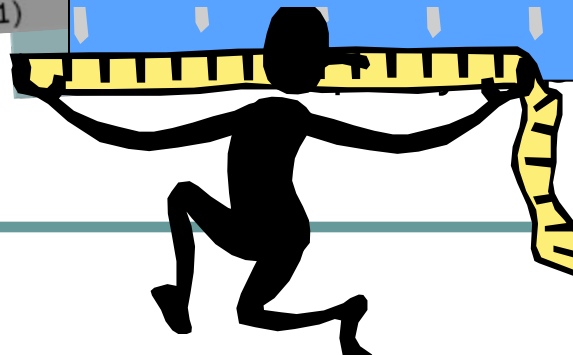
	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3
Principle #1			
Principle #2			
Principle #3			
Principle #4			
Principle #5			
Principle #6			
Principle #7			
Principle #8			
Principle #9			
Principle #10			
Principle #11			
<b>Total</b> (average of each line divided by 11)			

3.3 for State  
School of  
Character

2.7 for  
Honorable  
Mention

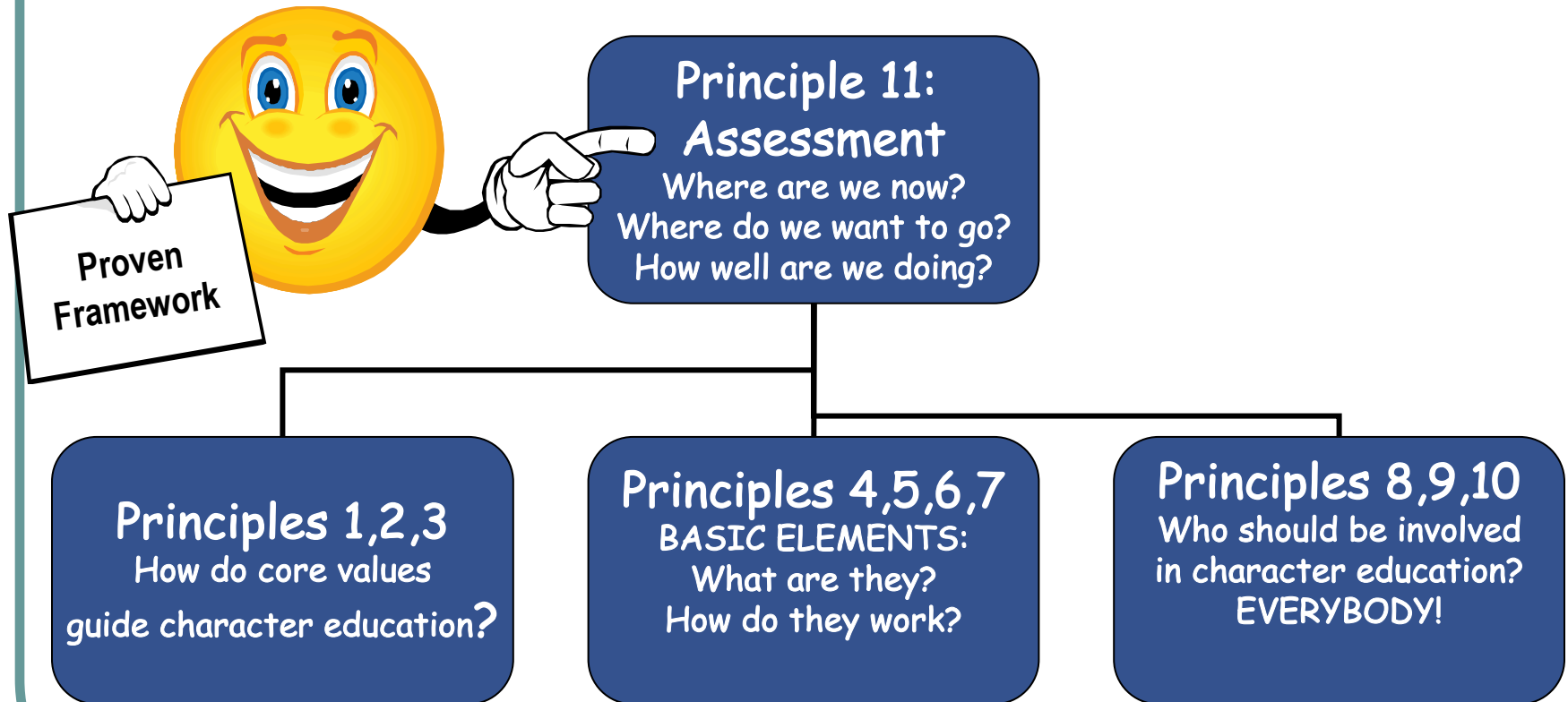
**NOTE:** Items are scored from 1 to 4.  
Use the key indicators of exemplary  
practice as a guide:

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





# Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education: An Overall View





# The Scoring Process

[www.character.org](http://www.character.org)  
**DOWNLOAD NOW**  
the Self-Assessment  
Tool/Score Sheet.

**EVALUATORS use**  
**this in scoring your**  
**application,**

Many schools have found the Self-Assessment Tool an invaluable aid to guide them in framing their narratives.

[Self-Assessment  
Tool and Scoring  
Guide](#)  
[Self-Tabulating Score  
Sheet](#)



# Self-Assessment Tool: Address each indicator (bulleted example) of each scoring item.

	Item #1	Item #2	Item #3	Item #4
1. Core Values are defined, implemented, and embedded into school culture.	<p><b>Stakeholders in the school community select or agree to core values:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All involved in choice; reflect on relevance if existence for some time</li> <li>Understand why &amp; how values selected</li> <li>A balance of both moral and performance values</li> </ul>	<p><b>Core Values guide every aspect of school life:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff, students, parents use common language</li> <li>Strong staff buy-in, modeling.</li> <li>Staff ownership for teaching, modeling, integrating core values into everything.</li> <li>Embedded in school policies and procedures</li> <li>Shape hiring practices, new staff training,</li> </ul>	<p><b>Reminders and statements of core values are visible throughout the school community.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In mission statement, handbooks, discipline code, website, school goals, etc.</li> <li>Defined in behavioral terms; “looks like”</li> <li>Staff, students, parents can identify/explain</li> </ul> <p><b>District: promotes values in vision, mission, goals, objectives, policies, public relations.</b></p>	
2. The school defines “character” comprehensively to include thinking, feeling, & doing.	<p><b>Staff teach and provide opportunities for students to understand core values, ethical decision-making, and applications to life situations.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff clarify values through instruction</li> <li>Staff can explain how students understand</li> <li>Students can explain/define/demonstrate behavior which models values</li> </ul>	<p><b>The school provides experiences and time for students to reflect on and internalize the core values.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing empathy and a sense of responsibility for others</li> <li>Reflect thru real-life problems</li> <li>Safety, belonging, autonomy needs met</li> </ul>	<p><b>The school provides opportunities for students to practice the core values, so they become habitual patterns of behavior.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examine self thru journals, discussions</li> <li>Practice and receive feedback (“I-messages, goal setting, active listening, role plays)</li> <li>Demonstrate/live core values (coop. groups, cross-grade tutoring, class meetings, peer mediation)</li> </ul>	
3. The school uses a comprehensive, intentional, proactive approach to develop character.	<p><b>The school is intentional and proactive in addressing social, emotional, and character development.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research-based standards, core competencies, or key developmental indicators to assure skills are taught.</li> <li>SECD skills are taught at all grade levels</li> </ul> <p><b>District: identified and adopted SECD skills in its instructional program or curriculum/.</b></p>	<p><b>Character is integrated into all aspects of teaching and learning.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In content of all subjects</li> <li>Opportunities to address ethical issues</li> </ul> <p><b>District: CE included in curriculum frameworks</b></p>	<p><b>CE is infused in all aspects of the school day.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All settings (lunch, fields, bus)</li> <li>Artifacts show that values guide TOTAL school life (sports, co-curricular codes)</li> </ul>	
4. The school creates a caring community.	<p><b>Caring attachments adults/students</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students perceive staff as caring</li> <li>Teachers attend school/social events</li> <li>Teachers/students connect in small groups</li> <li>Teachers counsel, mentor</li> <li>Discipline approached in caring and respectful way</li> </ul>	<p><b>Caring attachments among students</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students perceive student body as friendly</li> <li>Educational strategies foster caring/respect (Coop. learning; class meetings; cross-age groups)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Adults have caring attachments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents welcome</li> <li>Staff feels supported</li> <li>Staff, parents get along</li> <li>Administration collegial</li> </ul> <p><b>District: district-level develops caring with ALL staff</b></p>	<p><b>Peer cruelty, tolerance issues, bad language, put downs, bullying, differences are addressed</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students report bullying is infrequent</li> <li>Staff, students receive training in dealing with cruelty, bullying, intolerance.</li> </ul>
5. The school provides students with opportunities	<p><b>Clear expectations for service and service learning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Artifacts to Demonstrate: eg. conflict resolution, academic integrity, good sportsmanship, service, etc.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Within school</b>—all participate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides in-school opportunities e.g. cross-grade buddies, peer mediation, school care</li> <li>Connects service with the curriculum</li> </ul>	<p><b>In community</b>—“all” involved &amp; reflect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Time provided</li> <li>Connects service with curriculum</li> <li>Students assess community needs, initiate, plan</li> </ul>	

**Additional District Requirements in Red!**

# How Evaluators Score Your Application

- They read the narrative for each Principle.
- They check to see if you have addressed each key indicator (the bulleted item) for each Scoring Item (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.



## 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 character count!

# TIPS before we review each Principle



# Prin. 1: Core values defined, implemented & embedded into school culture.

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- Who, how, when were values chosen?
- Are they a mix of moral & performance?
- How are they common language?
- How did they affect hiring & training of new staff?
- How are they publicized?

**Stony Brook School, N. Plainfield: All district stakeholders chose C.A.R.D. – Caring, Acceptance, Respect, Determination – as core values & promoted them visually & in multiple ways.**



*Core Values Spark  
EVERYTHING.*

## Prin. 2: Defines character comprehensively to include thinking, feeling & doing<sup>16</sup>

- How is character taught?
- What proof is there the kids get it?
- How do you develop empathy? A sense of belonging? Autonomy?
- What strategies do you use to make it habitual? Cross-grade tutoring?

**Dennis B. O'Brien, Rockaway Township, uses cross-grade grouping, "i-messages," role playing, cooperative groups.**





## Prin. 3: Uses a comprehensive, intentional, proactive approach to develop character.<sup>17</sup>

- What research-based competencies do you use?
- How are SECD skills taught at all levels?
- How is character connected to the curriculum in all subjects?
- How is character infused into all settings (lunch, recess, sports, online) during school?



**3.1: NJ's 5 SEL competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, social decision-making) are derived from CASEL's research-based framework. Use this in 3.1.**

# Prin. 4: School creates a caring community

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- What proof is there that teachers are caring? That discipline is caring too?
- Do students perceive peers as caring?
- What strategies foster caring in kids?
- What proof is there that teachers & parents get along? That staff gets along?
- Proof that bullying is infrequent? What training is there in handling HIB?

**Juan Pablo Duarte-Jose Julian Marti - School 28 in Elizabeth, transformed itself by creating a caring culture. Twice recognized as a National School of Character!**



## Prin. 5: Provides opportunities for moral action (particularly service learning).

- How are students involved in conflict resolution, good sportsmanship, service?
- Can students differentiate between community service & service learning? Is there reflection?
- Provide examples of service learning in school; show ties to the curriculum.
- Provide examples of service learning in community with its curricular ties.



Hanover Park Regional High School has an amazing service-learning program. Check out its character education section: <https://www.hanoverpark.org>

## Prin. 6: Meaningful, Challenging Academic Curriculum that Respects All, Develops Char.

- How is your curriculum challenging & how does it promote mastery, voice & choice?
- How do you accommodate diversity? Do parents say teachers know students?
- How do you promote the performance values & academic integrity?



**Pauline Petway School in Vineland, twice recognized as a National School of Character, does extraordinary work in raising the aspirations of its diverse student body, many of whom are economically disadvantaged.**

## Prin. 7: Fosters Students' Self-Motivation.

- Do students understand the difference between intrinsic & extrinsic motivation?
- How has staff stressed intrinsic motivation?
- How do the core values enter into behavior management?
- How does class management reflect core values (students write class rules, etc.)?

**Unity Charter School in Morristown, with a mission to educate young citizens to be eco-literate with a strong sense of protecting the environment, has motivated them to initiate many projects on their own.**



## Prin. 8: Staff shares responsibility for implementing & modeling good character.<sup>22</sup>

- Evidence that teachers act as role models?
- Proof that all staff is involved in planning & implementing character education?
- Is CE training given to ALL staff, including support staff?
- Is sufficient release time given to staff for CE planning & training?



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

## Prin. 9: Shared Leadership & Long-Range Support for Continuous Improvement.<sup>23</sup>

- How is the principal a champion of CE & what long-range support for it exists?
- How does the CE Committee plan, implement & monitor CE initiative?
- What leadership opportunities exist for all students?

**Zane North School in Collingswood, twice recognized as a National School of Character, is a model of shared leadership with the principal, staff, parents, and students working harmoniously.**



# Prin.10: School engages families, community as partners in character education.

- How are parents actively involved in CE?
- In what ways do you communicate with them?
- How do you welcome them (especially newcomers) & recruit them for service?
- What parent workshops do you give?
- How do you involve the larger community?



**Mantua Township Public Schools partners with its parents & wider community in its “Big Night Out.” The brainchild of the Character Council, it is a three-hour outdoor party, open to the public & offering many activities for families & celebrating character education.**



# Prin.11:Assesses CE implementation, school culture, climate & student growth<sup>25</sup>

- Have you reviewed values annually? Made changes? Created a touchstone?
- Used quantitative & qualitative data for improvement & setting goals? Give examples.
- Has staff reflected & reported on character initiative? How?
- Assessed growth through data (surveys, state tests, report cards, behavior stats, exit surveys)

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



# CAUTION!

- Double check all Scoring Items of your Narratives to make certain that they rate **3 or above.**
- NO PRINCIPLE can have a score of **less than 3.**

## **TWO Principles requiring CAUTION:**



**P. 5:** Make certain you have **service learning** (with curricular ties) not just community service.

**P. 7:** If you can't eliminate **extrinsic motivation** altogether (maybe your district requires PBIS), show that the staff is doing everything possible to stress **intrinsic motivation** over **external rewards.**

# Portfolio Evidence



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

- 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,

**LABEL DOCUMENTS ON TOP FOR CLARITY!**

# Applying for a NJSOC, National School of Character Fees



**Mock Audit: \$250:** Score Sheet with Strengths, Areas of Growth – no official accreditation.

**State School/District of Character Accreditation:**

**School Application Fee: \$250**

**District: \$250+ depending on number of schools.**

**National School of Character Accreditation**

**School:** Additional \$250 Fee if you have been named a SSOC. National Site Visit with Report

**District:** Additional \$500+ Fee if you have been named a State District of Character. Varies over 13

# STOP: Additional Directions for Districts and Recertifications.

Schools/Districts for recertification must show growth & outreach.

Districts must address same items as schools and 13 additional ones.

Recertification Applicants must also address 11 Principles & show how they did Outreach & Growth.

# District & Recertification Applicants: Be aware of Additional Requirements

## DISTRICTS

- In addition to covering the bulleted items in their narratives, they must address the following 13 items:

1.3	8.2, 8.3
3.1, 3.2	9.1, 9.2
4.3	10.3
5.1	11.2, 11.3
7.1	

## 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.



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



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