

Tips for Writing a Successful State Schools of Character/National Schools of Character Application

These suggestions come from application evaluators

With a special thanks to Dr. Lucy Frontera, Ohio State Schools of Character coordinator

1. Organize the Narrative by the Principles (1, 2, etc.) and clearly label the section where each is discussed.
2. Use the *Quality Standards* sub-section descriptions for each Principle. Try to provide an example for as many of the statements as possible, and make the connection explicit and specific between your program/activity and the Principle. For example, “Teachers show caring for students by attending evening events and meetings, modeling respectful behavior, and greeting each student by name as they enter the classroom” vs. “teachers are caring.”
3. Often, a school program or activity can illustrate more than one Principle. If so, provide an explanation of the activity when it is first mentioned, but also refer back to it in any other section to which it applies. It is better to be redundant than to risk having the evaluator take off points for missing a supporting activity for one of the Principles.
4. Put the evidence in the Portfolio in sequential order according to the Principles.
5. Use the Portfolio to provide more detail for the activities referenced in the narrative. Organize it in numerical order, clearly labeling each page with the Principle (or Principles) it is illustrating. Help the evaluator by labeling each item in the portfolio with enough text to make the connection explicit between the Principle and the picture or item.
6. Make sure all the items in the Portfolio are readable and legible. Don't shrink items too small to be read.
7. When possible, provide data in the Portfolio to support your narrative. If you claim that discipline referrals have dropped, provide evidence in the Portfolio.

Components frequently omitted from applications that lead to lower scores:

1. **Principle 1:** Applicants do not list their core ethical values explicitly or describe how they were chosen or how stakeholders were involved in the selection of values. Applicants do not address how the values are defined behaviorally or if they are connected to the mission statement, discipline code or how they are connected to student character development.
2. **Principle 2:** Applicants do not address how understanding of values is communicated or encouraged explicitly and if the values are recognized to help students and adults “grasp the reasons why some behaviors are right and others wrong.”

3. **Principle 3:** Applicants do not explain the role of staff in planning the character education (CE) program or how the values are integrated into the academic content of all subjects. Make sure to address how the values impact class routines and extracurricular or athletic events.
4. **Principle 4:** Applicants do not address all facets of developing caring relationships. Make sure to address each combination—staff/student relationships, student/student relationships and adult/adult relationships (including parents and all staff).
5. **Principle 5:** Applicants do not include how values are explicitly tied to service projects. Most applicants have multiple service projects but do not elaborate how they communicate the expectation for service, how they are explicitly tied to the core values, how *all* students have opportunities, or how students are given opportunities to reflect on the projects.
6. **Principle 6:** Applicants do not address how they try to make the curriculum engaging and how they integrate character traits that support academic performance. Make sure to include how differences in student learning and culture are addressed.
7. **Principle 7:** Applicants do not address how the school/district encourages self motivation for all students, with minimal reliance on material rewards.
8. **Principle 8:** Applicants fail to communicate a clear plan for professional development that connects to advancing a “moral community” and character development. Applicants do not show how all staff model core values with as much specificity as possible. Make sure to include how non-teaching staff participate in the program, including training and planning.
9. **Principle 9:** Applicants fail to clearly describe the leadership team or committees that support a strategic planning process for their character education initiative. It is helpful to learn who (what roles) are represented on this committee(s), how often do they meet, do they have a strategic plan? Applicants do not indicate how students are involved in leadership roles and how they participate in creating classroom standards.
10. **Principle 10:** Most applicants have good parent involvement but do not explicitly describe how the parents are part of the CE program. Applicants do not show how the school/district informs and educates parents about CE so that they can support it at home. Include specific efforts to involve the larger community.
11. **Principle 11:** Many applicants assess students but do not regularly assess teachers or measure teacher reflection on their own efforts to implement CE. Collect data from multiple sources and include in the Portfolio. If asserting improvement in academics/discipline, include data from a few years.