

GUIDE TO APPLYING FOR SCHOOL AND DISTRICT OF CHARACTER

School of Character Information

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 over 1000 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 volunteers are educators, and many have been through this process with their own schools. Our volunteers do this work because earlier volunteers helped them on their school's character journey. Our volunteers truly embody the spirit of the phrase 'pay it forward'.

The process of becoming a School of Character is built on *The 11 Principles Framework: 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. We hope you find the process of becoming a School of Character meaningful and inspiring.

There are many ways schools can begin this process. We recommend familiarizing yourself with *The 11 Principles Framework*. Overview information can be found on our website <https://character.org/11-principles-in-schools/>. More detailed information can be found in our *11 Principles* guidebook, which is available for [purchase](#). We encourage schools to have at least one guidebook on hand for their team to reference.

Please visit <https://character.org/getting-started/> for more information about next steps and be sure to download and save this document which includes application and announcement dates and details about the review process.

Thank you for doing this important work.

We are here to support to you!

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School of Character Information

The 2023 School of Character Application deadline is Friday, November 11, 2022

State Schools of Character will be announced Friday, January, 27, 2023

National Schools of Character will be announced Wednesday, May 24, 2023

Designation Application: 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 the state review is \$250.00. Please note: Districts must be eligible to apply and fees are based on the number of schools in the district (see Information for Districts below).

There are two levels of review, state and national, and two certifications schools and school districts can receive: State School (District) of Character and National School (District) of Character. National certification is the highest honor bestowed by Character.org. All National Schools and Districts of Character are formally recognized at Character.org's annual [International Forum](#).

Once you submit your School of Character application, it is sent to your state review team for evaluation. All applications are reviewed by evaluators trained by Character.org. State evaluators will determine the extent to which your school is implementing the *11 Principles*.

The state review is completed prior to the state announcement in January. At the time of the state announcement each applicant will receive, by email, their state report which will include their designation, scores, and comments on strengths and areas of growth. Schools not receiving state certification will be designated as Honorable Mention or Emerging Schools of Character.

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

Schools that receive State School of Character certification are eligible for the national review and will be asked if they wish to participate in that year's review using the application already submitted. No edits may be made to an application between the state and national review. The national evaluation is a more rigorous review of a school's implementation of the *11 Principles*. National evaluators review the school's application and state report, and conduct a site visit with the school to determine whether the school meets the criteria to receive national certification.

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

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. Schools review the scores and feedback provided in their state report to determine when to apply for national certification.

Character.org strongly recommends schools wait to apply for national certification if they receive 2's on their state report.

Current State Schools of Character Applying for National Certification

Current State Schools of Character may apply for national certification during each year's application period for the 5 years of their State School of Character designation. Schools can use the same application already submitted, or submit a new application. New applications are recommended if more than a year has passed since receiving state certification. 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.

The application fee for the national review is \$250.00.

Honorable Mention and Emerging Schools of Character

Schools who receive Emerging or Honorable Mention designations will be reviewed for State School of Character certification upon completing and submitting a new application during a subsequent year's application period.

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.

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.

The application fees for districts depends on the number of schools in the district.

https://character.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/SoC-Application_Fees.pdf

International Schools

International schools follow the same process as U.S. schools. There are two levels of review and designation, with the name of the city where the school is located being the first level designation and the name country where the school is located being the second level designation. International schools will 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 certified in 2018 would submit an application in the fall of 2022 for certification in 2023.

Recertifying schools complete and submit a new application and provide information outlined in the [recertification guidelines](#) which includes outreach. Schools will be re-certified 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*. All recertifying schools should review the [recertification guidelines](#) prior to filling out an application.

If a school is not ready, or is unable to apply in their recertification year but wishes to be recertified in a subsequent year please contact Character.org's Director of Schools.

The Mock Audit

The Mock Audit is for schools that may not be ready for designation 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.

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

Tool and Resources

The 11 Principles Guidebook Available for purchase, we recommend schools have at least one [guidebook](#) on hand for their team to reference. If you are a recertifying school, please make sure you have an updated copy.

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/> 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/>

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

When does the application open?

The 2023 application opens in July 2022.

When are applications due?

The 2023 application deadline is Friday, November 11, 2022 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.

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. We do ask, however, that you [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 program?

We partner with many organizations that promote character development and provide resources for families, schools, sports teams and the workplace to use as part of their comprehensive character initiative. Character.org does not endorse any particular program or approach. We encourage schools to use the *11 Principles Framework* to develop a character initiative that best suits the needs of their students, staff, families and school community.

Should I purchase an 11 Principles Guidebook?

We strongly encourage 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. Guidebooks are available in English and Spanish. Bulk purchases are available by contacting dean@character.org.

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/>.

What will I need for my application?

Applicants will be asked to provide:

- Your school's core values.
- Your school's demographic information.
- Academic, behavioral, and school culture and climate data.
- Self-assessments from stakeholders.
- Testimonials from stakeholders.
- A narrative of your school's character journey, and, if reapplying or recertifying, how you've addressed previous feedback, how you've grown your initiative, and your outreach efforts.
- 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.

How should I organize my information?

We encourage you to gather all the information you need prior to filling out the application online. **Please keep copies of your narratives, artifacts, and data. This helps you in case of technical issues, and it helps those who come after you find information.** *Please note: If you start an application online but do not submit it by the deadline, your information will not be saved in our system.*

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.

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 formally recognized at Character.org's annual [International 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.