

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

These general suggestions come from application evaluators
with a special thanks to Dr. Lucy Frontera, Ohio State Schools of Character program manager:

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 reader take off points for missing a supporting activity for one of the Principles.
4. 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 reader by labeling each item in the portfolio with enough text to make the connection explicit between the principle and the picture or item.
5. Make sure all the items in the portfolio are readable and legible. Don't shrink items too small to be read.
6. 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 the applications that lead to lower scores:

1. **Principle 1:** Applicants do not list their core 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 were defined behaviorally or if they were connected to the mission statement or discipline code.
2. **Principle 2:** Applicants do not address how understanding of values was communicated or encouraged explicitly.
3. **Principle 3:** Applicants do not explain role of staff in planning the character education 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:** Make sure to include how values are explicitly tied to the service projects. Most applicants have multiple service projects, but do not elaborate how they communicate the expectation for service, how they explicitly tie it to their core values, 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 academics with their core values, and specifically performance values such as self-discipline and hard work. Make sure to include how differences in student learning and culture are addressed.
7. **Principle 7:** Make sure to address how you encourage self-motivation for all students, with minimal reliance on material rewards.
8. **Principle 8:** Describe 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:** Discuss 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 character education program. Applicants often do not describe their efforts to inform and educate parents so that they can support character education at home.
11. **Principle 11:** Many applicants assessed students, but do not regularly assess teachers or measure teacher reflection on their own efforts to implement character education. Collect data from multiple sources and include in portfolio.