



Ways to Use CEP's *National Schools of Character: Award-Winning Practices* in Your School or District

Making connections with fellow practitioners

CEP hopes that educators engaged in character education will work together and learn from one another. National Schools of Character (NSOC) are expected to serve as models for other schools. Look at the lists of NSOC Winners, (Semi) Finalists, State Schools of Character (SSOC), and Promising Practices winners in your books. Are any of these schools in your state or district? Is it possible for you to visit any of these schools—or have educators from any of these schools visited or communicated with you?

Using the Winner articles for staff development

The articles about the NSOC Winners tell the inspiring stories of their character education journeys. Form a group of staff members (and perhaps parents, community members, and even students). Select one of the Winners most like your school or district. Read the article and discuss issues such as the following.

- How is this school or district like your school or district? How is it different?
- What and who motivated or initiated character education at this school?
- What are the distinguishing characteristics of this school's character education initiative?
- How did this school create an initiative uniquely suited to its needs and population?
- How does this school's initiative exemplify each of CEP's *Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education* (downloadable from CEP's website)? Be specific.
- What impact has character education had on this school community? Look at the data presented in the article. How do you explain the changes in school culture and academic performance?
- What specific strategies, programs, resources, or ideas will you take away from the story of this school or district? Could you implement any of these at your school? What would you like to try after exploring this article? What was most interesting or inspiring to you?

Alternatively, break into groups and have each group member read a different Winner article and share with the group. Discuss the common themes and outcomes in these articles. What can your school learn from these schools?

Using the Sample Practices in your school or district

Look at the Reproducibles or Sample Practices (in the 2001–2008 books only). Would any of these practices be helpful in your school? Might your school adapt any of these practices to fit the needs of your community?

Addressing your school's strengths and areas for growth through Promising Practices

Think about your school's strengths as well as aspects of your school's character education initiative that could benefit from improvement. What do you have to teach others? What aspects would you like to improve or change? If you are unsure, take the *Character Education Quality Standards* self-assessment (downloadable from CEP's website).

Once you identify the areas for growth and improvement that you would like to address, turn to the Promising Practices to find relevant best practices. These winning practices are fully described in the 2000–2004 books. In 2005 and 2006, descriptions appeared on CDs that accompanied the book. Since 2006 the practices have been organized according to the Eleven Principles and listed in the book, with full descriptions appearing on CEP's website.

Discuss some of the things other schools are doing that address your areas of concern. What might your school try? Create an action plan for improving your school's character education program.

Once you identify some of your school's best practices in character education, consider submitting them for recognition in CEP's Promising Practices awards program. Read more about the program and the simple online application process online at www.character.org.

Exploring the State/National Schools of Character application process

After reading more about the NSOC program and the Winners, consider whether your school or district is ready to apply for recognition as a State/National School of Character. Learn more about the application process and find out whether your state is participating in the State Schools of Character level of competition. Gather a group of stakeholders to discuss whether or not you should apply.

- What are the benefits for applicants?
- What resources are available to applicants?
- What is the application process like?
- What are the strengths of our program? In what ways are we a model for others?
- What are we doing to address each of the Eleven Principles?
- Are we ready to apply at this time? If so, how do we move forward? If not, what should we focus on this year to improve our character education initiative?

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