



CHARACTER EDUCATION QUALITY STANDARDS KEY INDICATORS FOR SSOC/NSOC APPLICANTS

In your SSOC/NSOC application, you will be asked to provide evidence regarding how well your school or district's character education initiative has been implemented according to CEP's Eleven Principles. When you conduct a self-evaluation using the Quality Standards, or when evaluators review your application or visit your school, the following scale will be used. A "4" should only be given when evidence of full implementation is available.

- 0 Not evident (no visible evidence)**
- 1 Some implementation (little evidence)**
- 2 Good implementation (evidence of preliminary stages of implementation)**
- 3 Very good implementation (evidence of active implementation)**
- 4 Exemplary implementation (evidence of full, effective, and consistent implementation)**

This guide is intended to help applicants know what a "4" looks like to evaluators and site visitors and determine what evidence to include in the application.

Principle 1: The school promotes core ethical values and supportive performance values as the foundation of good character.

Key indicators of exemplary practice and full implementation:

1.1 The school promotes core ethical and performance values that stakeholders in the school community have agreed upon or given assent to.

- A highly inclusive, representative group of stakeholders (staff, parents, students, and community members) agreed upon or assented to the school's core ethical and performance values. If the district selected the values or if the values have been in place for a long time, stakeholders find ways to revisit and reflect on the values and how to apply them within the school community.
- Staff understand why and how the school selected its core values and how they are important to a democratic society.

1.2 The school defines its core ethical and performance values in terms of age appropriate observable behaviors.

- Students, staff, and parents can define the core values in terms of observable behaviors (e.g., when asked to define responsibility, students can give an example such as completing their homework).
- Students, staff, and parents can explain how students demonstrate the core values through the practice of specific social skills both inside and outside the school.
- Defining core values is an on-going process that may involve students, staff, and parents.

1.3 The school has made deliberate and effective efforts to make its core ethical and performance values and their behavioral definitions widely known throughout the school community.

- Core values appear in the school building, in the school mission statement, on the school website, in the student handbooks, in the discipline code, in newsletters home, and at school events.
- Staff, parents, and students can identify the core values and recognize their importance as a distinctive feature of the school.
- (For districts): The district establishes character education as part of its vision, mission, goals, objectives, regulations, policies, and public relations efforts.

Principle 2: The school defines “character” comprehensively to include thinking, feeling, and behavior.

Key indicators of exemplary practice and full implementation:

2.1 The school takes deliberate and effective steps to help students acquire a developmentally appropriate understanding of what the core values mean in everyday behavior and grasp the reasons why some behaviors are right and others wrong.

- Staff consistently address the logic of moral arguments and how the application of core values can help support moral behavior.
- Staff can explain how they help students understand the core values (e.g. teachers can point to lessons they have taught).
- Students can explain why core values are important, how various behaviors exemplify those values, and why some behaviors are right and others are wrong.

2.2 The school takes deliberate and effective steps to help everyone appreciate the core values, reflect upon them, desire to embody them, and become committed to them.

- Staff help students to develop and appreciation for and commitment to core values (e.g., by developing empathy for others and a sense of responsibility for others, and through moral exemplars in literature, history, sports, the media, and everyday life).
- Staff provide opportunities for students to reflect on the core values through discussions of moral dilemmas and questions.
- Staff make strong efforts to meet the needs of students for safety, belonging, and autonomy as these form a foundation for developing a commitment to core values.

2.3 The school takes deliberate and effective steps to help students practice the core values so that they become habitual patterns of behavior.

- Staff encourage students to examine their behavior in light of core values and challenge them to make their behavior consistent with their best understanding of and commitment to core values (e.g., reflection through appropriate use of journal writing, discussion of events in the classroom, adult-student conversations on past or present behavior, etc.).
- Students receive practice in and feedback on behavioral skills (e.g., setting goals, listening attentively, sending “I” messages, apologizing) through the ordinary conduct of the classroom (e.g., procedures, role plays, class meetings, cooperative learning groups).
- Students have opportunities to practice the core values, especially in the context of relationships (e.g. through cross-age tutoring, mediating conflicts, and helping others).

Principle 3: The school uses a comprehensive, intentional, and proactive approach to character development.

Key indicators of exemplary practice and full implementation:

3.1 The school is intentional and proactive in addressing character at all grade levels.

- Individual teachers, grade-level teams, and the staff as a whole participate in strategic planning for character education.
- The school has created a plan for character education with written goals and objectives, or the school follows the district’s plan.
- (For districts): The district has included character education in its strategic plans (e.g., mission statement, goals, objectives), defines character education clearly as a process, and requires integration into all aspects of school life.

3.2 Character education is regularly integrated into academic content.

- Teachers teach core values and engage students’ moral reasoning through issues and events embedded in their academic content (e.g., the virtues historical leaders possessed, character-related themes in literature, the principles of scientific investigation) and provide opportunities for students to address ethical issues that arise within academic subject matter (e.g., how lessons of history guide moral choices; how scientific discoveries have ethical implications).
- The school can provide artifacts of lesson planning from all teachers that explicitly include the integration of character into academic content—lessons that support the development of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills.

- (For districts:) The district ensures that character education is included in academic curriculum frameworks and seeks to apply the vocabulary of character to develop student thinking to include knowledge, comprehension, application, synthesis, analysis, and evaluation of lessons in history, literature, or school life where character traits provide a moral compass.

3.3 Character education is a priority in how all classes are conducted.

- Routines in all classrooms address students' need for belonging, autonomy, and competence.
- Routines in all classrooms are respectful of students and engage them in ways that develop traits such as responsibility, fairness, and caring. Teachers can explain how core values impact classroom routines and the procedures of those routines are clearly identified, taught, and practiced by students.

3.4 Character education is infused throughout the school day to include sports and extracurricular activities; core values are consistently upheld by adults and taken seriously by students throughout the school environment.

- The school communicates clear and consistent expectations throughout the total school program (e.g., sports, clubs) and all areas of the school (e.g., cafeteria, halls, playground, playing fields, library, buses).
- Members of the school community (specifically students) easily communicate and point to artifacts that refer to the core values that guide class, team, or club goals and procedures throughout the total school program.

Principle 4: The school creates a caring school community.

Key indicators of exemplary practice and full implementation:

4.1 The school makes it a high priority to foster caring attachments between staff and students.

- Students perceive staff as caring and report that they could go to an adult in the school with a problem.
- Staff frequently attend school events; students and parents report that they do.
- The school encourages and makes provisions and time for students and teachers to meet in small group settings such as class meetings or advisory periods.
- Teachers provide extra help in academic work and counsel or mentor students when needed.
- Teachers create inclusive classrooms where students have "voice and choice."

4.2 The school makes it a high priority to help students form caring attachments to each other.

- Students perceive the student body as friendly and inclusive.
- The school uses educational strategies (e.g., cooperative learning, cross-age mentoring, class meetings) to encourage mutual respect and a feeling of responsibility for one another.

4.3 The school does not tolerate peer cruelty or any form of violence and takes steps to prevent peer cruelty and violence and deal with it effectively when it occurs.

- Students report that bullying (including cyber bullying), teasing, and acts of cruelty or intolerance are extremely rare in their school and are not tolerated by staff.
- All students participate in activities, programs, and processes that promote tolerance, understanding, respect, and peace among students (e.g., conflict resolution, anti-bullying programs, peer mediation, class meetings).
- Staff receive training in ways to identify, constructively address, and discourage peer abuse (e.g., bullying, put-downs, racial slurs, insensitive gender remarks, remarks on appearance, economic or social status) and increase students' understanding of and respect for personal, economic, and cultural differences.

4.4 The school makes it a high priority to foster caring attachments among adults within the school community.

- Parents, community members, and guests report feeling welcome in the school.
- Staff perceive the work environment as positive and their colleagues as supportive and caring. Artifacts demonstrate ways their relationships are nurtured (e.g., social gatherings, helping those in need, celebrating successes and accomplishments).
- Staff make efforts to form positive relationships with students' parents and guardians. Parents and teachers both report feeling respected by one another.
- Staff report that the administration fosters a collegial atmosphere.
- (For districts): Staff at the district level make efforts to develop caring and respectful relationships among themselves, with staff at the school level, and in the broader community.

Principle 5: The school provides students with opportunities for moral action.

Key indicators of exemplary practice and full implementation:

5.1 The school sets clear expectations for students to engage in moral action in terms of civility, personal responsibility, good sportsmanship, helping others, and service to school and community.

- The school can provide artifacts that demonstrate how civility, personal responsibility, good sportsmanship, helping others, and service are taught; and can provide examples of how these things were taught and what they have learned.
- The school establishes and communicates clear expectations regarding community service and service learning. The school can point to school-wide expectations for personal and social responsibility.
- Relevant stakeholders (students, teachers, and parents) know the school's expectations regarding moral action. Students and staff readily acknowledge their responsibility for these expectations.
- (For districts): The district encourages and sets clear guidelines and expectations for community service and/or service learning and other programmatic opportunities for moral action.

5.2 The school provides students with repeated and varied opportunities for engaging in moral action within the school, and students engage in these opportunities and are positively affected by them.

- The school effectively provides all students with opportunities for moral action within the school (e.g., peer or cross-age tutoring/mentoring, classroom or student body governance, and service projects related to the care of the school or school grounds), and students take advantage of these opportunities and benefit from them.
- Teachers connect service within the school with curriculum and core values, creating service-learning experiences.
- The school sets aside time for students to assess the need for service-learning projects within the school, create ideas for meeting those needs, plan and coordinate the service, and reflect on their learning with the help of adults in the school.

5.3 The school provides students with repeated and varied opportunities for engaging in moral action in the larger community, and students engage in these opportunities and are positively affected by them.

- The school effectively provides all students with opportunities for participation in community service (e.g., working with the elderly, helping the homeless, needy, or animals, or caring for the environment), and students take advantage of these opportunities and benefit from them.
- Teachers connect community service with curriculum and core values, creating service-learning experiences.
- The school sets aside time for students to assess community needs, create ideas for meeting those needs, plan and coordinate service-learning projects, and reflect on the positive consequences of community service with the help of adults in the school.

Principle 6: The school offers a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners, develops their character, and helps them to succeed.

Key indicators of exemplary practice and full implementation:

6.1 The academic curriculum provides meaningful and appropriate challenges to all students.

- Teachers provide all students with opportunities to interact with academic content in engaging, hands-on, appropriate ways (e.g., cooperative learning, problem-solving, and experience-based projects). Students report feeling challenged by and excited about what they are learning in school. Parents report that their children are appropriately challenged and that teachers have high expectations.
- Classroom activities naturally incorporate ethical issues and address students' interests and questions (e.g., addressing current ethical issues in science, debating historical practices and decisions, and discussing character traits and ethical dilemmas in literature) and classroom discussions demonstrate age-appropriate reasoning challenges for students with the goal of developing higher-order thinking skills (analysis/evaluation).
- The school community focuses students to seek mastery goals of learning as opposed to simply performance goals defined by letter grades.
- Instruction increases students' sense of competence and emphasizes student autonomy (e.g., by providing them with opportunities to think creatively and test their ideas and by fostering a sense of "voice and choice"). Students report that they have some say in decisions and plans that affect them (e.g., choice of projects or products, scheduling of due dates).

6.2 The school staff identifies, understands, embraces, and accommodates the diverse cultures, skills, interests, and learning needs of all students.

- Teachers participate in adequate and ongoing staff development that enables them to meet individual student needs and share best practices in diverse and effective instructional strategies.
- Staff members engage in accurate and ongoing identification of students' learning needs and differentiate instruction appropriately. Differentiated instruction appears organic—a natural part of the school day for all students.
- Staff value, respect, and help all students to excel. Parents and students report that teachers know their students well and understand and respond to their learning needs and cultural differences.

6.3 Teachers promote the development of performance character traits that support students' intellectual growth, academic performance, and increasing autonomy.

- Teachers promote thinking habits (e.g., curiosity, truth-seeking, critical thinking, and open-mindedness) that lead to intellectual growth in students. Students are aware of their own goals and growth as learners.
- Teachers promote work-related habits (e.g., perseverance, diligence, self-discipline, and challenge-seeking) that help students do their best work and become increasingly autonomous.
- Teachers promote social habits (e.g., honesty, responsibility, collaboration) that help students work together harmoniously (e.g., through cooperative learning).
- Teachers promote and students report the importance of academic integrity in the completion of work.

Principle 7: The school strives to foster students' self motivation.

Key indicators of exemplary practice and full implementation:

7.1 The school explicitly values good character for its own sake.

- School and staff statements on character education explicitly include mention of moral motivation.
- Students are able to articulate on a personal level what it means to be self-motivated and why it is important (e.g., students can describe strategies for setting goals to improve personal qualities like generosity and compassion and performance values like self-discipline and perseverance).

7.2 Staff and students recognize and celebrate the natural, beneficial consequences of acts of character rather than rewarding students with material recognition (behavior modification rewards).

- Staff can explain how they have specifically addressed the question of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. They make conscious choices about their position and seek agreement on a shared philosophy and associated practices (e.g., how all members of the school community will think about and act upon the concepts of praise, rewards, and punishment).
- Recognition is inclusive of members of the school community (e.g., recognizing the character strengths and unique qualities of each student in a classroom rather than having students earn the title "student of the week"). The school refrains from excessive singling out of students for good deeds or encouraging competition for recognition among students or classrooms.
- Staff use methods of classroom management that foster intrinsic motivation and avoid adapting programs that are reward-based. Schools that integrate PBIS (Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support) with character education only use behavior modification techniques with students with significant need.
- Staff and students recognize and express gratitude to each other in natural settings (e.g., hallways, classrooms, playing fields, meetings) as part of the everyday life of the school.
- (For districts): Districts use their public relations programs to focus attention on outstanding acts of good character.

7.3 The school's approach to student conduct and behavior management emphasizes core values within constructive discussion, explanation, reflection, and consequences.

- The school provides staff training in developmentally appropriate forms of classroom management, which includes a focus on developing clear character-based expectations for behavior throughout the school and is supported by the publication, instruction, and practice of procedures to support school expectations.
- The school discipline code is based on discussion, explanation, and consequences clearly linked to core values. Consequences are consistent, fair, not physically harmful, and are communicated to and discussed with parents.
- Staff routinely deals with behavior issues in ways that encourage reflection according to the core values, offer students opportunities for reparation and moral growth, and respect students as individuals (e.g., positive discipline strategies).
- Students have a developmentally appropriate role in classroom management and school governance (e.g., participating in the creation of behavioral norms and rules, class meetings, conflict resolution programs, and student governance bodies such as student court).

- Teachers discuss academic integrity with students in terms of fairness and personal honor, establishing clear guidelines about what constitutes doing one's own work and acceptable collaboration vs. plagiarism and cheating.

Principle 8: The school engages the staff as a learning and moral community that shares responsibility for character education and attempts to adhere to the same core values that guide the education of students.

Key indicators of exemplary practice and full implementation:

8.1 The school includes all staff in planning, receiving staff development for, and carrying out the school-wide character education initiative.

- All professional and support staff receive training and information on their role in the character education initiative and understand the part they play in its success. Administrators, teachers, and counselors receive ongoing staff development. The school can provide artifacts of these professional development activities and faculty note how these activities result in teaching or classroom practices.
- The school has created a sustained "ethical learning community" through professional development and opportunities for sharing and input. Staff value the sharing of ideas and being a learning and moral community.
- All staff have opportunities to be involved in character education planning and implementation. Teachers, administrators, and counselors are substantially involved.
- (For districts): The district trains teachers, principals, and other school personnel in character education and social-emotional learning on a recurring basis; trains new teachers; provides funding for staff planning, training, and attending conferences on character education.

8.2 Staff model the core values in their interactions with students and each other, and students perceive that they do.

- Staff are courteous to students and each other, and demonstrate respectful and supportive behavior toward students.
- When asked how they can best help students understand and act on the core values, staff will specifically cite their role as a model for student behavior.
- Students report that staff are courteous and model the core values.

8.3 The school regularly makes adequate time available for staff planning and reflection in regard to character education.

- Aspects of the character education initiative appear regularly on the agenda of faculty meetings and in-service days.
- Administration provides staff release time for development of promising ideas, planning of events, and reflection.
- Teachers use core values to reflect on their own behaviors and procedures.
- (For districts): The district stimulates information sharing by providing venues for collaboration among schools; establishing a centralized source of materials, curricula, and other tools; and sponsoring regular conferences/meetings on character education.

Principle 9: The school fosters shared moral leadership and long-range support of the character education initiative.

Key indicators of exemplary practice and full implementation:

9.1 The school's character education initiative has leaders, including the school principal, who champion character education efforts, share leadership, and provide long-range support.

- Stakeholders (e.g., faculty, parents, students, community members) report that the principal is a visible and supportive champion of the effort who values and trusts their input but that if the principal left the school, character education efforts would continue at full strength as a result of shared leadership and school culture.
- Actions and statements of the principal and other key leaders (e.g., articulation of goals and principles, modeling and personal example, and decisions regarding policies, personnel, staff development, and allocation of time and other resources) are clearly supportive of character education and the long-range survival and growth of the initiative.
- (For districts):
 - Character education is a shared priority of the district board and superintendent.

- The district hires school principals and central office personnel committed to character education and encourages them to incorporate character education into their work.
- The district requires central office personnel (e.g., superintendents, directors of sports and physical education, counseling, media services, school-to-career, service learning, student services, and administrative services) to incorporate character education into their work.

9.2 A leadership group or structure (several linked groups) inclusive of staff, students, and parents guides the ongoing planning and implementation of the character education initiative and encourages the involvement of the whole school in character activities.

- An inclusive leadership group or structure (e.g., character education committee or task force, standing school committee(s), committee of the whole) guides character education strategic planning and implementation. The school can provide artifacts such as minutes, strategic plans and/or project portfolios that describe this group's activities.
- Stakeholders can identify the groups or structures that guide character education planning and ways they can have input into decisions that affect them. They report shared ownership of the decision-making process.
- The school's regular governing mechanisms assume responsibility for management of character-related policies and plans.
- (For districts): There is an ongoing leadership group (or structure) that includes district and school staff and community members.

9.3 Students are explicitly involved in creating and maintaining a sense of community and in other leadership roles that contribute to the character education effort.

- Students create and maintain standards of behavior (e.g. classroom rules, honor code) and have responsible roles within the classroom and school community (e.g., character ambassadors, safety patrols, student government, school newspaper editors, peer mediators) and opportunities for leadership at various levels (e.g., learning groups, classroom, the school, extracurricular activities).
- Students value the leadership roles available to them and identify themselves as members of wider communities (state, nation, world) in which they can play positive and contributory roles.
- The school can provide artifacts that recognize the recruitment, training, and activities of student-led activities.

Principle 10: The school engages families and community members as partners in the character-building effort.

Key indicators of exemplary practice and full implementation:

10.1 The school engages families in the character education initiative.

- Parents serve in character education leadership roles and are actively involved in carrying the character initiative into the parent-teacher organization and parent community.
- Families report being aware and supportive of the initiative.
- The school offers workshops and resources related to character education and general parenting skills.
- Parents and guardians frequently volunteer in the school, and they are active contributors to, and participants in, school and classroom events.
- The school office is physically laid out to welcome parents and staff prioritize inclusive outreach to parents.

10.2 The school and its faculty regularly exchange communications with parents and guardians, providing suggestions and activities that help them reinforce the core values and receiving input regarding the effectiveness of the initiative.

- The school (e.g., individual teachers, departments or teams, extracurricular clubs, principal, district office, parent-teacher organization) communicates with families about their character education efforts. They use a variety of techniques (e.g., report cards, notes, e-mails, phone calls, newsletters, parent-teacher conferences, group meetings, workshops, websites).
- The school can provide evidence of strong two-way communication regarding the character education initiative. Parents do not just receive information from the school, they also provide input, guidance, and evaluation data to the school regarding the effectiveness of the initiative and how it might be improved.

10.3 The school recruits the help of the wider community.

- Community members (e.g. representatives of local government agencies, business partners, religious organizations, youth organizations, other schools) serve in character education leadership roles and are actively involved in carrying the character initiative into the larger community.
- Members of the larger community report being aware and supportive of the initiative, and elements of the initiative may be integrated into community activities (e.g., youth sports programs, after-school activities, youth-serving organizations such as 4-H or scouts, businesses or other organizations that promote core values or helping with service projects).
- Community members volunteer in the school and are active contributors to, and participants in, school and classroom events.
- (For districts): The district engages a broad spectrum of the community in their character education initiative, with particular focus on involvement of appropriate local government agencies, non-school youth-serving organizations, and the business community.

Principle 11: The school regularly assesses the character and climate of the school community, the school staff's functioning as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character.

Key indicators of exemplary practice and full implementation:

11.1 The school regularly assesses (both quantitatively and qualitatively) school climate and the character of the school as a learning and moral community to determine the success of the character initiative and areas for growth.

- The school can provide artifacts demonstrating character education initiative assessment results and how it used the results to improve the initiative. The school uses qualitative and quantitative data in an ongoing manner to make changes and improvements.
- Data on academic achievement shows positive results since the implementation and growth of character education.
- Data on school culture and climate gathered from students, staff, and parents shows increasingly positive results.
- (For districts): All schools regularly assess school climate.

11.2 The staff periodically report on their efforts to implement character education, as well as on their growth as character educators.

- Teachers periodically gather feedback from their students on their perceptions of character-related activities and the extent to which teachers are modeling the core values.
- The school requires all staff to reflect upon and report on their efforts to meet character education goals.
- Staff reporting includes structured and informal opportunities (e.g., focus groups, faculty discussions, and committee meetings) to examine and reflect on data.
- The school staff reports on efforts to implement character education to audiences of stakeholders (e.g., students, the full staff, parents, district leaders and policy makers, relevant community members)
- (For districts): The district builds implementation of character education into the assessment of school principals and in turn encourages principals to evaluate integration of character education into their assessments of school staff.

11.3 The school assesses student behavior and progress in developing an understanding of and a commitment to the qualities of good character in ways that reflect core values.

- The school uses a variety of approaches (e.g., report cards, student-led parent/teacher conferences, goal-setting rubrics) to assess student progress in the area of character development.
- In questionnaires and reflections on character-related behaviors and core values, most students report favorably on questions related to core values, such as "students in this school respect one another."
- Data collected on student behavior (e.g., attendance, suspensions, vandalism, service hours, drug incidents, and cheating) shows growth in the understanding of and commitment to good character.