

State Schools of Character Awards

Thanks to a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation, CEP launched the State Schools of Character (SSOC) project in 2006. The extension of the National Schools of Character program to include state-level awards has been an effective means of expanding participation in the program. By identifying exemplary sites to serve as models within participating states, the SSOC project increases the number of outstanding schools and districts sharing best practices and helps to develop a state-level mentoring network among educators.

Sponsors in participating states receive a grant of \$6,000 to set up and execute a process for soliciting and screening applications for SSOC awards which is parallel to that used by CEP in selecting the National Schools of Character (NSOC). The funding is provided for initiating the project, with the understanding that the sponsor will continue the SSOC program in future years. A variety of state entities have signed on as sponsors, such as state departments of education and organizations whose mission features character education as the central focus or a key component.

The NSOC and SSOC applications are identical, but schools and districts in participating states make application to their state sponsor, while those in non-participating states apply directly to CEP for the national award. CEP trains state evaluators to use the same evaluation process that CEP uses. In 2006, the New Jersey Center for Character Education (now the Center for Social and Character Development at Rutgers University), in partnership with the New Jersey Department of Education, became the first state sponsor to confer SSOC awards as a preliminary step to the national competition. In 2007, state sponsors from 12 additional states initiated SSOC competitions: California, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maryland, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, and

Utah. Sponsors from another seven states began holding competitions in 2008: Illinois, Kansas, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, Virginia, and Wisconsin. Still another eight states will begin participating in 2009; those states and their sponsors are listed later in this article.

In some states where a school or district received the 2007 State Schools of Character award but not the 2007 NSOC award, the state sponsor sent its 2008 application directly to CEP for evaluation. In other states, each year is viewed as a separate competition, and schools and districts that received the 2007 SSOC award had to also receive the 2008 SSOC award in order to proceed to the national competition. In 2008, state sponsors continued to give additional awards, such as Finalist, Honorable Mention, and Emerging School of Character.

In 2008, ten of the eleven NSOC Winners and twelve of the fourteen NSOC Finalists are from states that had state sponsors in 2008. These results seem to indicate that the SSOC project is helping effective character education to grow and thrive in participating states.

What Are State Schools of Character?

State Schools of Character (SSOC) are schools or districts in a particular state that have been honored for their outstanding work in character education and invited to serve as models for other educators in that state. Every SSOC wins an award from its state sponsor and is given the opportunity to participate in the National Schools of Character (NSOC) competition. Sponsoring organizations use the same criteria to judge SSOC applications that CEP uses to judge the NSOC awards. In 2008, 17 state sponsors made a total of 44 State Schools of Character awards. In 2009, over half of the 50 states in the country will be sponsoring State Schools of Character awards.

The state superintendent (far left) and a representative from the U.S. Department of Education (far right) present the North Carolina SSOC award to the counselor (center left) and the principal of Winter Park Elementary School at the NC Safe Schools and Character Education Conference.



2008 Sponsors and Winners

CALIFORNIA

STATE SPONSOR:

Center for Youth Citizenship

Marengo Ranch Elementary School¹
Galt Joint Union Elementary School District
Galt, California

Mulberry School
Los Gatos, California

FLORIDA

STATE SPONSOR:

The Golden Rule Foundation

Aventura City of Excellence School (ACES)¹
Miami-Dade County Public Schools
Aventura, Florida

Endeavour Elementary
Magnet School of Technology
Brevard Public Schools
Cocoa, Florida

Sawgrass Lake Elementary School
Pinellas County Schools
St. Petersburg, Florida

Seminole Elementary School
Pinellas County Schools
Seminole, Florida

Wilton Manors Elementary School²
Broward County Public Schools
Wilton Manors, Florida

GEORGIA

STATE SPONSOR:

Kennesaw State University

Gainesville High School¹
Gainesville City School System
Gainesville, Georgia

ILLINOIS

STATE SPONSOR:

University of Illinois Extension

Franklin Elementary School
Belleville Public Schools District #118
Belleville, Illinois

Hinsdale Central High School²
Hinsdale Township High School District 86
Hinsdale, Illinois

IOWA

STATE SPONSOR:

Institute for Character
Development at Drake University

Malcolm Price Laboratory School¹
Cedar Falls, Iowa

Pocahontas Area
Community School District
Pocahontas, Iowa

KANSAS

STATE SPONSOR:

Kansas State
Department of Education

Robinson Middle School
Unified School District #501
Topeka, Kansas

Sterling High School
Unified School District #376
Sterling, Kansas

MARYLAND

STATE SPONSOR:

Maryland Center for
Character Education

Dynard Elementary School
St. Mary's County Public Schools
Chaptico, Maryland

Westminster East Middle School
Carroll County Public Schools
Westminster, Maryland

MASSACHUSETTS

STATE SPONSORS:

Hudson Public School District,
the Center for the Advancement
of Ethics and Character at Boston
University, and the Massachusetts
Department of Education

Col. John Robinson School
Westford Public Schools
Westford, Massachusetts

Mill Pond School¹
Westborough Public Schools
Westborough, Massachusetts

MINNESOTA

STATE SPONSOR:

Minnesota Center
for Academic Excellence

Orono Public School District
Long Lake, Minnesota

MISSOURI

STATE SPONSOR:

CHARACTERplus

Bayless Junior High School¹
Bayless School District
St. Louis, Missouri

Bowles Elementary School
Rockwood School District
Fenton, Missouri

Mark Twain Elementary School
Brentwood School District
Brentwood, Missouri

Sappington Elementary School²
Lindbergh School District
St. Louis, Missouri

Sullivan Primary School
Sullivan School District
Sullivan, Missouri

Valley Park Middle School²
Valley Park School District
Valley Park, Missouri



A Hinsdale Central High School student and staff demonstrate their emphasis on “the head, the heart, and the hands” while displaying their Illinois SSOC banner.

¹ 2008 National Schools of Character Finalist

² 2008 National Schools of Character Winner



Glenwood Ridge Elementary School's counselor (center left) and principal (center right) accept a Kansas Promising Practices award from the state board of education chairman (far left) and the state attorney general (far right) at the Kansas SSOC awards celebration at the Brown v. Board of Education historical site in Topeka.

NEW JERSEY

STATE SPONSORS:

Center for Social and Character Development at Rutgers University and the New Jersey Department of Education

Brigantine Elementary School¹

Brigantine Public Schools
Brigantine, New Jersey

Colonia High School

Woodbridge Township School District
Colonia, New Jersey

Hamilton Township Public Schools¹

Hamilton, New Jersey

Horace Mann Elementary School

Cherry Hill Public Schools
Cherry Hill, New Jersey

Lawrenceville Elementary School

Lawrence Township Public Schools
Lawrenceville, New Jersey

Livingston Park Elementary School

North Brunswick Public School District
North Brunswick, New Jersey

Lore Elementary School¹

Ewing Township Public Schools
Ewing, New Jersey

Rosa International Middle School²

Cherry Hill Public Schools
Cherry Hill, New Jersey

Veterans Memorial Elementary School

Brick Township School District
Brick, New Jersey

Woodcrest Elementary School

Cherry Hill Public Schools
Cherry Hill, New Jersey

NEW YORK

STATE SPONSOR:

Academy for Character Education at The Sage Colleges

Babylon Memorial Grade School²

Babylon Union Free School District
Babylon, New York

Waterloo Middle School²

Waterloo Central School District
Waterloo, New York

NORTH CAROLINA

STATE SPONSOR:

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

Winter Park Elementary School

New Hanover County Schools
Wilmington, North Carolina

OHIO

STATE SPONSORS:

Ohio Partners in Character Education, Ohio Department of Education, and Ohio Better Business Bureaus

Herman K. Ankeney Middle School¹

Beavercreek City Schools
Beavercreek, Ohio

TEXAS

STATE SPONSORS:

Houston, Dallas, and Klein Independent School Districts

West Intermediate School

Cedar Hill Independent School District
Cedar Hill, Texas

UTAH

STATE SPONSOR:

Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Center for Community of Caring at the University of Utah

Scott M. Matheson

Junior High School
Granite School District
Magna, Utah

William Penn Elementary School

Granite School District
Salt Lake City, Utah

VIRGINIA

STATE SPONSOR:

Greater Roanoke Valley Character Coalition

Arlington Traditional School¹

Arlington Public Schools
Arlington, Virginia

Roanoke County Public Schools

Roanoke, Virginia

WISCONSIN

STATE SPONSOR:

Wisconsin Character Education Partnership



The principal of Col. John Robinson School (left) with Governor Deval Patrick at the Massachusetts State House, site of the SSOC awards celebration

¹ 2008 National Schools of Character Finalist

² 2008 National Schools of Character Winner

State celebrations to honor the SSOC and other award winners continue to be creative and varied. In a number of states, state officials presented the 2008 awards. For example, Kansas held its ceremony at the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site in Topeka, with state dignitaries presenting. At Iowa's annual character awards banquet, presenters included the former governor, while Minnesota held its ceremony at the Capitol Rotunda, with the commissioner of education presenting. Massachusetts held its ceremony at the State House, with members of the state legislature presenting, followed by a meeting of the governor with all 50 representatives from the two award-winning schools. State officials were part of the planning for New York's annual Champions of Character awards banquet, where SSOC winners received their awards this year. Missouri again held its awards ceremony at the annual Characterplus conference, with state officials presenting. In Ohio, the SSOC winner again received its award at a Cincinnati Reds game.

Coordinators of the SSOC project find that the awards programs in their states are helping character education flourish. Sue Kidd from the Kansas Department of Education, says, "The State Schools of Character process in Kansas is encouraging schools and districts to take a look at the ways they foster the development of good character and to develop comprehensive, schoolwide, integrated programming. The SSOC process allows us to highlight the good things that are happening so that we can share our successes and learn from one another." Dr. Phil Brown, director of the Center for Social and Character Development at Rutgers University,



The principal of Waterloo Middle School (center left) accepts a New York SSOC award at The Academy for Character Education at The Sage Colleges' annual Champions of Character awards banquet.

speaks for New Jersey, which had 25 applications in 2008, more than any other state. He says, "One of the unexpected benefits of the State Schools of Character program is that it serves as a way to identify pockets of excellent practice, which enables us to enrich the quality of professional networking across the state." Liz Gibbons, director of Characterplus, speaks for Missouri, which received six NSOC awards (five Winners and one Finalist) in 2008, more than any other state. She says, "More schools have applied for the Missouri Schools of Character program than ever applied in the past to the national competition. Because of the state awards, schools now feel they have more of a chance to be recognized for excellence in character education."

STATES TO BEGIN PARTICIPATING IN 2009 AND THEIR SPONSORS:

- Colorado**—Foundation for Character Development
- Indiana**—Indiana Department of Education
- Kentucky**—Character Council of Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky
- Michigan**—Michigan Department of Education
- Pennsylvania**—Center for Leadership and Ethics
- South Carolina**—South Carolina Department of Education
- South Dakota**—Technology and Innovation in Education (TIE)
- West Virginia**—June Harless Center at Marshall University

For more information, contact Janice Stoodley, Director, National Schools of Character.



West Intermediate School received its SSOC award at a school assembly celebration where students, parents, and community members could participate.