



## Schools of Character Core Values and Approaches

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Congratulations to the 85 schools and 7 school districts recently certified as our 2020 Schools of Character. Welcome to our Character.org family!

Here are a few “data points” about our new 2020 Schools of Character family:

### Breakdown by grade level

- 42 elementary schools
- 16 middle schools
- 14 high schools
- 7 K-8 schools
- 4 Pre-K or K schools
- 1 combined MS/HS (grades 6-12)
- 1 K-12 school (Colombia)

### Core Values

- This cohort highlighted a total of 392 core values, an average of 4-5 per school
- The core value cited most: Respect!
- Here are the Top 10: Respect (62); Responsibility (51); Integrity (26); Citizenship (17); Caring (16); Safety (15); Kindness (13); Empathy (12); Trustworthiness (11); Fairness (10)
- This year’s applications cited 74 unique core values. (**See below for a listing of every core value**)

### Touchstones and Unifying Themes

Each School of Character has its own “character-inspired” language – a touchstone, motto, acronym, or unifying theme that drives home the message of what it means to be a member of your particular school community. We know from the research how critical it is for schools to create a **common language**. Here are a few examples of touchstones that anchor our schools’ character initiatives:

- Salk Middle School (NY) learns to RISE (Respect, Integrity, Safety, Empathy)

- At Rocky Branch Elementary (GA) students know that ROCKETETS stands for (Respect, Ownership, Contribution, Kindness, Effort, Teamwork, Solutions)
- Everyone at Cherry Hill West High School (NJ) knows what it means to do it the “West Way”  
Students at Fort Settlement Middle School (TX) takes the Falcon Code of Conduct (Be respectful, be responsible, be safe, and be ready to learn!)  
Owls are WISE is the unifying theme at Oxford Valley Elementary (PA) -  
**Work together, Integrity, Safety, Effort**  
Students at Cambridge Elementary (MO) take the Pirate Pledge (“I have the **courage** to be a good citizen. I have a **responsibility** to show **self-discipline** and **integrity**. I am a Belton Pirate, and I **contribute** to making my school...a better place to be”)  
Orlando Science Middle School (FL) students learn about ORCAS (**O**utreach toward community, **R**espect and compassion for all, **C**elebrate diversity, **A**dvocate for a safe learning environment, **S**trive for excellence within a stimulating environment)

### Character-inspired Practices

Our schools’ character practices go beyond words and phrases. Your common language touches every aspect of the school community, from the classroom and lunchroom to families and the wider community. Here are a few examples of how you offer students the opportunity to understand, care about, and consistently practice the core values that will enable them to flourish in school, in relationships, in the workplace, and as a citizen:

- Crestview Middle School (MO) establishes and tracks three goals for the school year: 100% of students holding a leadership role, 100% of students accomplishing a personal goal, and 100% of students being involved in a service project.
- Vestavia Hill Elementary (AL) has a daily **Heights Huddle** where students learn about a different character strength by watching a video on the core value, sharing their personal experience, and talking about how they can model that core value.
- Mabрино STEAM Academy (TX) has a campus-wide house system. Each member of the campus (staff and students) belongs to a house, and every month members of that house plan a character development activity around a core value.
- Imagine Kissimee Charter Academy (FL) students participate in **Community Time**, a time for students and their teacher to discuss a real life situation and how that situation relates to the IKCA’s core values.

- Forest Park Individual Education School (IL) work closely with parents to ensure that all families are aware of the school's Positive Discipline approach.
- Coldwater Elementary (MO) emphasizes SEL with a zones of regulation approach. It's common to hear teachers ask students struggling with their emotions: "What zone are you in?"
- Dennis O'Brien Elementary (NJ) assigns each grade level a core value for that month. Each grade level performs a short presentation (e.g. songs, skits) on what they feel that core value means.
- Oakville High School (MO) focuses on the "**Portrait of a Graduate**" that includes each student demonstrating these character strengths: creative and critical thinker, self-aware, persistent, communicator, and ethical and global citizen.
- Harmony School of Innovation Fort Worth (TX) offered a day of professional development they called **Empathy Academy** to inspire and equip the entire staff to build secure relationships with their students by using meaningful and authentic dialogue.
- Wren Hollow Elementary (MO) students meet monthly with their **Character Family**, a group of multi-grade students led by a staff person. Each family stays together year after year, learning from each other the WH core values.
- Eastern Christian School (NJ) asks each student to create a **Core Values Portfolio** that is added to each year. The school also has capstone projects tied to the portfolio in grades 5, 8, and 12. For example, 8th graders write a letter to their future selves.

### **Special Shout Out to Our 7 School Districts**

- Windsor School District (Missouri)
- Eastern Christian School Association (New Jersey)
- Lawrence Township Public Schools (New Jersey)
- Old Bridge School District (New Jersey)
- Pennsbury School District (Pennsylvania)
- West Milford Township Public Schools (New Jersey)
- Imagine Schools (Virginia)

## Notable Programs and Approaches Supporting Your Initiatives

There is no one program, curriculum, or set of teaching practices that a school must use to have a successful character initiative. The beauty of the *11 Principles* is that it provides the framework for schools to connect all the good things they are doing to foster students' social, emotional and character development. Schools of Character seamlessly braid a number of different programs, or parts of programs, into their comprehensive character development initiative.

Below is a sampling of resources and programs you described as critical and essential to your character initiative:

- 10 schools use the six pillars developed by [Character Counts!](#)
- 6 schools integrated the "7 Habits" found in the [LeaderinMe](#) program.
- 4 schools implemented [SWPIS](#) and are working toward students becoming more self-motivated by reducing extrinsic motivators (School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports).
- Many schools used [Second Step](#) developed by the Committee on Children or [Responsive Classroom](#).
- 1 school focused on the approach developed by [Character Strong](#).
- 1 school used the [Nurtured Heart Approach](#) developed by the Children Success Foundation.
- 1 school worked closely with [Project Adventure](#).
- 1 school integrated the [Positive Discipline](#) approach.

You also listed some Character.org resources like the National Forum and Schools of Character evaluator feedback.

## 5 Questions to Ponder

1. **PURPOSE.** There is a lot of research on the importance of youth purpose. Yet only one school – the Harmony School Innovation in Houston (TX) had "purpose" as a core value. Is purpose important?
2. **PORTRAIT OF A GRADUATE.** Several middle and high schools, such as Oakville High School (MO), wrote about their "Portrait of a Graduate." Does your school district identify qualities that every high school student should be able to demonstrate before graduating?
3. **FINDING YOUR INNER VOICE.** The Jefferson School (NJ) is placing special emphasis on the new 8<sup>TH</sup> Habit of the Leader in Me program: Finding Your Inner Voice. How does your school encourage students to find their inner voice?

4. **INTRINSIC MOTIVATION.** Many schools commented that they appreciated the feedback they received from the SOC evaluators that focused on reducing school's emphasis on extrinsic motivators. What research do you use to help you understand motivation? Have you considered doing some further research on the concepts of celebration vs. reward? What do researchers say about extrinsic and intrinsic motivators?
  
5. **11 PRINCIPLES.** Which one of the *11 Principles* was most difficult for your school to address in an authentic, substantive way? How did you overcome the challenge? How did it impact your initiative?

**A complete listing of all 74 Core Values cited by our 2020 NSOC/NDOCs**

1. Respect (62)
2. Responsibility (51)
3. Integrity (26)
4. Citizenship (17)
5. Caring (16)
6. Safe (15)
7. Kindness (13)
8. Empathy (12)
9. Trustworthiness (11)
10. Fairness (10)
11. Cooperation (9)
12. Perseverance (9)
13. Self-control/discipline (8)
14. Acceptance (7)
15. Honesty (7)
16. Determination (6)
17. Courage (5)
18. Excellence (5)
19. Leadership (5)
20. Optimism (5)
21. Compassion (4)
22. Ownership (4)
23. Service (4)
24. Teamwork/Collaboration/Work Together (4)
25. Trust (4)
26. Fun (3)
27. Generosity (3)
28. Gratitude (3)
29. Justice (3)

30. Motivation (3)
31. Unity (3)
32. Accountability (2)
33. Creativity (2)
34. Curiosity (2)
35. Effort (2)
36. Friendship (2)
37. Grit (2)
38. Hope (2)
39. Loyalty (2)
40. Ready (2)
41. Resilient (2)
42. Zest/Enthusiasm (2)
43. Achieving
44. Authentic
45. Be Your Best
46. Contribution
47. Dignity
48. Diverse
49. Engaged
50. Encouragement
51. Equity
52. Focus
53. Humility
54. Inclusive
55. Innovation
56. Involvement
57. Nurturing
58. Open-hearted
59. Opportunity
60. Peace and Harmony
61. Positive
62. Prepared
63. Professionalism
64. Purpose
65. Responsive
66. Relationships
67. Resourceful
68. Set Goals
69. Solutions
70. Success
71. Thought
72. Togetherness
73. Tolerance
74. Work for the Common Good