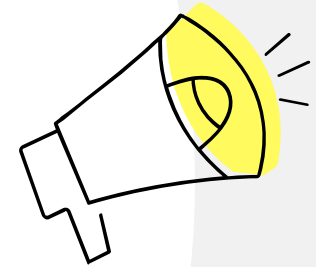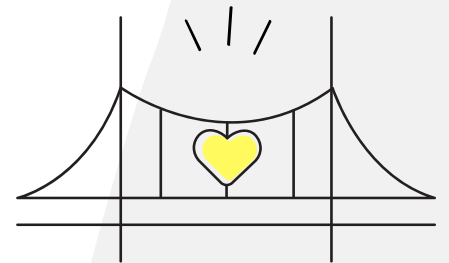# CharacterStrong

Commitment to Equity
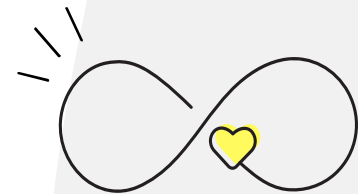
1. CharacterStrong **Creates Space For All Voices**

2. CharacterStrong **Practices Bridging to Create Belonging**

3. CharacterStrong **Believes That A Commitment to Equity is an Ongoing Process**

CharacterStrong Creates Space For All Voices

By centering our work in humble and empathetic listening, we seek out and amplify diverse perspectives. In doing so, we hold space for inclusive dialogue and shared leadership. In order for our content and organization to effectively serve all people, we make sure groups who have historically been marginalized have a seat at the table. We build and maintain non-hierarchical structures that acknowledge the power of the collective.

For students, this includes:

Offering innovative, student-centered SEL sessions that prioritize youth voice so that lessons are being done "by and with them" and not "to and for them"

Pausing to question all products and systems by asking "How can this be 1% better?" Creating spaces for student input and co-creation on our products (i.e. student advisory boards, student focus groups and surveys, and internship opportunities) so they have a voice in building the things they will experience

Featuring students from diverse backgrounds in our video and photo content to increase a sense of belonging and help students see themselves (and others) in this work

Developing content that represents diverse voices and communities.

For educators, this includes:

Developing free digital resources for continued learning (i.e. monthly webinars, the annual Whole Child Virtual Summit, and weekly CharacterStrong Podcasts) in order to elevate various voices doing meaningful work in education in a way that is accessible to all (and provide actionable tools to all schools to focus on SEL effectively)

Seeking out educator input (i.e. the educator advisory roundtable (E.A.R.), educator product focus groups, educator listening sessions, annual surveys, and online feedback systems) in order to ensure diverse perspectives are speaking into our products and services

Developing content and trainings through a lens of accessibility (i.e. Spanish translations, closed captioning, alt text, and live transcription) to serve people who have diverse needs

Providing Customized Implementation Supports that use data and implementation science to serve diverse stakeholders in achieving equitable access and outcomes

For CharacterStrong, this includes:

Focusing on recruiting potential CS employees, vendors, and contractors from diverse spaces around the country in order to bring more voices into the development of our work

Maintaining an accountability chart instead of an organization chart to promote less hierarchical decision making

Utilizing democratic voting systems in weekly and quarterly meetings to elevate all voices

Creating opportunities for direct and indirect feedback so everyone feels like their voice and opinion can be heard safely

CharacterStrong Practices Bridging to Create Belonging

Bridging occurs when people reach beyond their own group to members of other groups. Bridging, according to John Powell, requires that we create space to hear and see each other. It does not require agreement. The practice of bridging is meant to create belonging - a foundational human need. We work to acknowledge and understand the differences in lived experiences across diverse communities, which influences the creation of relevant content and helps build an organization where people feel safe and are able to thrive.

For students, this includes:

Centering collective experiences and student voice in the development of things like community agreements to create opportunities for people to express what they need to feel safe and belonging in a space

Providing opportunities for intentional groupings that highlight the uniqueness of every student and provide consistent opportunities for bridging

Emphasizing the importance of social awareness and relationship-building to help practice effective empathy, which involves both perspective-taking and compassionate action

For educators, this includes:

Building professional learning experiences that provide tools (like Establish, Maintain, Restore) that create habits of personal reflection and consistent connection

Developing tools like the Equity Training to deepen personal awareness, better understand our biases, and build skills that help people better serve the entire school community

Offering free podcasts, resources (like the CS Weekly), and webinars that provide anecdotes and practices that help serve diverse needs

Hosting conferences that focus on practical connection tools for educators as an essential foundation of learning and providing strategies and tools to bring these to life back in their schools and classrooms

For CharacterStrong, this includes:

Hosting bi-annual in-person meetings to provide opportunities to practice teamwork and collaborative problem solving

Strengthening relationships through The Weekly Toast, onboarding lunches, virtual socials, birthday Kahoots, and more to help our team see our differences and commonalities
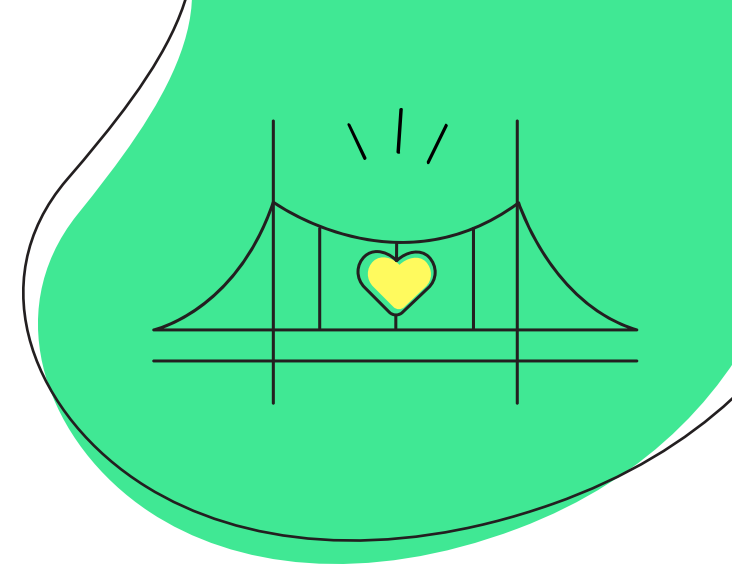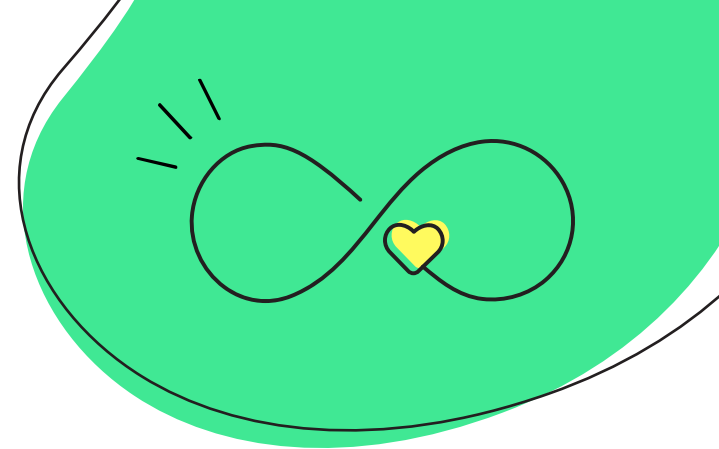
CharacterStrong

CharacterStrong Believes That A Commitment to Equity is an Ongoing Process

We know that equity work is an ongoing commitment, and we recognize the importance of protecting time to examine our own biases, perspectives, and experiences. We are committed to consistently holding space for reflective conversations, and ultimately, working to create systems that welcome all people into our equity journey. This process is not finite.

For students, this includes:

Seeking to understand how different students react to and learn from our programs by assessing student engagement survey data, focus groups, and in-class observations to understand which groups of students benefit more and less from our content

Providing opportunities for students to reflect and grow on their own SEL journey relevant to their age

Planning for growth through intentionally adding themes and scaffolding of needed topics like perspective-taking or mental health to allow multi-year reflection and learning for students in the curriculum

Utilizing student advisory groups and focus groups to continue to support developing content that is authentic, equitable, and engaging

For educators, this includes:

Identifying educators who have a harder time embracing and effectively implementing our programs and seek to understand and address their needs so that all educators can thrive in this work!

Identifying gaps in the needs of educators across diverse settings by capturing their experiences with our programs in order to increase fidelity

Listening to the feedback and ideas of educators through survey data and listening sessions to create resources that are timely, practical, and relevant

Evaluating and aligning our curriculum with updated national standards to ensure that it is evidence-based

Understanding and responding to the social and political context that educators are working in so that they can meet the changing needs of the classroom

For CharacterStrong, this includes:

Committing to ongoing equity work with external partners so that we can benefit from external expertise and perspectives

Honoring the diverse traditions and backgrounds of team members (i.e. recognizing land acknowledgments, personal pronouns, and various holidays)

Creating consistent relational opportunities to build a more inclusive environment and making sure team members feel understood, respected, and have a sense of belonging

Donating the profits from our Online Equity Course to the advancement of equity work through our partnership with Erin Jones

Donating to entities that champion diverse needs and students to empower other ways that people approach this work (like Cispus Learning Center and Haiti Partners)