

**National Forum  
and  
California Schools to Watch**



# **Instructions**

## **Schools to Watch® 2025 Application Instructions**

### **New and Redesignating School Applications California**

Updated: March 12, 2024

## 2025 California Schools to Watch Application Instructions

*Dear Principal,*

*Thank you for applying to the Schools to Watch® program either as a first-time applicant or as an existing School to Watch that is ready to redesignate. Each year, I drive across California visiting potential and existing Schools to Watch. There are now 200 California Schools to Watch serving as mentors and models, and all of them have built programs and cultures that are special, unique, and full of ideas and inspirations.*

*I look forward to reading your completed application and seeing what your school community is doing to serve all of your students well. Please feel free to contact me (see “Questions” on page 3) if you need help or have suggestions to improve the program.*

*All my best,*



Scott Steele  
Director, California Schools to Watch

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## OVERVIEW, DEADLINE, QUESTIONS, AND ELIGIBILITY

### Overview

The Schools to Watch® program, offered by the California Department of Education and the California League of Schools at the state level and the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform at the national level, seeks to identify and honor schools with middle-level grades (enrolling any combination of young adolescents aged 10-15) that are academically excellent, developmentally responsive, socially equitable, organized and structured for continuous improvement, and exemplars of the Schools to Watch criteria.

While many schools meet the minimum eligibility criteria, not all schools that apply will be selected for visitation and/or designation. However, all applicants are invited to network with CA-STW schools, with the goal of one day being named a model school.

Schools that are designated as California Schools to Watch (and therefore become National Schools to Watch) participate fully in the Schools to Watch network. They attend the California Schools to Watch Conference in the spring and the National Schools to Watch Conference in the summer, tour one another's schools, and host visiting educators who want to see their programs in action (it is expected that Schools to Watch will serve as models and mentors).

We believe that all young adolescent students deserve middle-grade schools and programs that are academically excellent, developmentally appropriate, socially equitable, and organized to sustain continuous improvement. Thank you for applying to the program.

### **California League of Educators**

*Providers of the California Schools to Watch Program*

### **National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform**

*Provider of the National Schools to Watch Program*

### **California Department of Education**

*Partner of the National Schools to Watch Program*

## Deadline

For potential Schools to Watch applying for the first time, **the deadline for application submission is Tuesday, October 1, 2024, 11:59 pm PT**. All required items must be provided by this date for consideration.

## Questions?

Please read this entire document carefully, and then, if you still have questions, email Scott Steele, director of the California Schools to Watch program, at [ssteele@leagueofschools.org](mailto:ssteele@leagueofschools.org) (preferred) or call him at (800) 326-1880, ext. 105.

## Eligibility

- Schools seeking initial designation as a STW<sup>®</sup> school must serve any combination of young adolescents aged 10-15.
- Middle schools, junior high schools, and K-8 or K-12 schools with distinct middle-level programs are eligible.
- All schools must satisfy the following requirements:
  - State and Federal Monitoring: Schools are not being state or DOJ monitored and do not have any unanswered or ongoing civil rights violations.
  - Replicability: School programs need to be replicable by other schools with varying student populations.

## APPLICATION PROCESS

The Schools to Watch program application is designed so that schools themselves must complete the process. Applications prepared by external grant writers or paid consultants will not be accepted.

### **There are four major steps in the application process:**

- (1) Have your entire certificated staff participate in taking the Schools to Watch rubric **online** so everyone's perspective is incorporated into your application.
- (2) Compile several other required support documents.
- (3) Incorporate information from the rubric results and support documents as your team writes your application narrative.
- (4) Submit your application by (a) uploading all required documents to the California League of Schools' 2024 applications folder and (b) sending Scott Steele, director of the California Schools to Watch program, an email informing him you have uploaded all documents.

All of this must be accomplished by **October 1, 2024**. Based on our previous experience, we recommend completing as much as possible in the last part of the 2023-24 school year. It can be challenging for teams to start a new school year and write an application at the same time (although many schools do this). All steps can take place over a 4- to 5-week timeline.

### **We recommend approaching the application this way:**

There are three components to the application: the rubric, the support documents, and the narrative.

### **Schools to Watch Rubric (allow three weeks)**

As soon as your school decides to submit an application, you will need to complete the National Forum's online Schools to Watch Self-Study Rating Rubric. To begin the online rubric process, [complete the form](#). It takes the **University of Illinois Center for Prevention, Research, and Development (CPRD)**, the research group in charge of the rubric, at least a week to prepare a custom portal for your school.

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It is helpful to have all certificated staff [review a copy](#) of the Schools to Watch rubric ahead of time to become familiar with it. Once you have received an email notification from CPRD with a link to your custom portal, have all certificated staff [fill out the online Schools to Watch rubric](#) over one week. Staff need to participate in this online data collection process for your application to be eligible for review.

The rubric process should take approximately 20-25 minutes per person. Please share with your faculty that it is important to answer the questions thoughtfully and candidly: the Schools to Watch program is not looking for perfection, instead we look for schools serving all students well. We value social equity and developmental responsiveness just as much as academic excellence.

Once your certificated staff have completed the rubric, the data analysis process will take CPRD another week. The results will be emailed to you at that time. Schools can submit their online rubric information free of charge as long as they apply to the Schools to Watch program by the deadline for that year. If they do not apply, the researchers who devoted their professional time to reviewing the rubric will assume the school is using the results for school improvement instead, and the school will be charged \$300 by CPRD.

### Support Documents (allow one week)

While you wait for CPRD rubric results, download copies of the following blank or template support documents and fill them out, or print out the required data (links to these documents can also be found on the [California Schools to Watch page](#)). Save each of the completed documents with the following naming format: Year (2025), state abbreviation, school name (short version), document type. Digital signatures will be accepted for pages requiring signatures.

- Save a copy of the [School Demographics document](#)  
Fill out your copy and save it as a PDF  
**Example:** Save the finished document as  
**2025CAYourSchoolNameDemographics.pdf**
- Save a copy of the [Writing Team document](#)  
Fill out your copy and save it as a PDF  
**Example:** Save the finished document as  
**2025CAYourSchoolNameWritingTeam.pdf**

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- Save a copy of the [Assurances document](#)  
Fill out your copy and save it as a PDF  
**Example:** Save the finished document as **2025CAYourSchoolNameAssurances.pdf**
- Save a copy of the [California Addendum document](#)  
Fill out your copy and save it as a PDF  
**Example:** Save the finished document as **2025CAYourSchoolNameAddendum.pdf**
- Save a copy of the [California Dashboard document](#)  
Follow instructions to “generate all reports for your school” as a PDF.  
**Example:** Save the finished document as **2025CAYourSchoolNameDashboard.pdf**

**You will upload ALL supporting documents via the [2025 Schools to Watch Application Uploads](#)  
Be sure all files are complete and named correctly before beginning the upload process.**

### Narrative (allow two weeks)

Assign a group of staff members as writers for the narrative and have them begin writing once they have the CPRD rubric results and the other documents at hand. We estimate that writing the application will take approximately 20-30 person-hours. When putting together your team, consider ensuring representation of grade levels, subjects, length of time at the school, and role (e.g., administrator, teacher, social worker, counselor, etc.).

To begin the narrative, create a multi-page Google Doc or Microsoft Word document with 12-point body paragraph type, 1-inch margins, a header with your school name, 1.15- or 1.5-line spacing, page numbers, and enough white space and bold subheads to aid understanding for the Schools to Watch principals who will volunteer to read the applications. Tell your story clearly using stories and data from the rubric, support documents, and your site as appropriate. Again, Schools to Watch is not looking for perfection, we are looking for how well you serve all students and the story of your school’s ongoing journey of whole child-oriented, continuous improvement.

The page numbers provided are more of a guide; please feel free to take the space you need to tell your story (while keeping your story clear and straightforward). In your narrative, please address the following.

## **1. School Overview (6-8 pages):**

### **A. Schools to Watch status**

Please address that you are a new applicant for 2025.

### **B. Contact information**

School name:

School district/LEA:

School address:

School phone:

Name of principal:

Years as principal of this school:

Principal's email address:

Principal's cell phone:

Assistant Principal's name:

Assistant Principal's email address:

School website URL:

School Twitter (optional):

School Facebook (optional):

School Instagram (optional):

### **C. Collaborative process**

Completing the STW® initial designation application should be a collaborative process involving the entire school community. Describe the process used at your school, noting the level of involvement of teachers, counselors, administrators, the school's shared decision-making committee, and any others.

### **D. Program information for the current school year**

**Instructional minutes:** How are your instructional minutes organized per grade level (periods per day, block schedule, flexible block, semestered, self-contained, departmentalized, etc.)?

**Courses per grade level:** What courses are taught at each grade level and for how long?



**Academic intervention/other services:** How are you ensuring that students needing academic intervention and/or other mandated services receive required instruction in standards areas for which there are no mandated state assessments?

**Connecting students to school:** What special opportunities/experiences does your school provide students that are designed to connect them to the school, to make them feel successful, and to create a positive school climate and culture?

**English learners:** Describe the programs and/or services provided English learners (EL), if applicable, and provide evidence of their impact on student achievement.

**Students with disabilities:** Describe the programs and/or services provided students with disabilities, if applicable, and provide evidence of their impact on student achievement.

**Student subgroups not meeting standards:** If any subgroup in your student population did not meet standards in one or more subjects last year, please describe the steps taken to meet the needs of these students at your school.

#### **E. Changes, recognitions, and suspensions**

##### **Recent changes:**

Provide information on changes that may have happened over the past year, including:

- Changes in district and/or site-level administration
- Turnover in the teaching staff
- Budget issues faced by the school that impact middle-grades programming
- Changes in the school's organization, structure, program, or demographics
- Major changes in the master schedule
- Changes in how students are grouped and/or assigned to classes

##### **Special recognitions:**

Please let us know about any research projects, grant awards, articles, projects, or special awards for your school in the last three years. Please include dates, sponsor names, etc.

##### **Suspension data for the most recently completed school year:**

Help us understand your school's suspension policy data (please refer to the School Demographics supporting document you filled out for this Schools to Watch application).

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- Describe your school’s suspension policy and the interventions in place to meet the needs of students suspended either in or out of school.
- Please explain any unusual incidents of suspension greater than five days that may have skewed the reported suspension data for the most recently completed school year (e.g., suspensions for weapons violations, bomb threats, etc.).

### 2. Schools to Watch Domain Alignment (5 to 10 pages):

#### **A. How your school addresses the Schools to Watch domains (the rubric)**

For each of the four Schools to Watch domains (Academic Excellence; Developmental Responsiveness; Social Equity; and Organizational Structures and Processes), write a 1-to-2 page narrative explaining the story behind your school’s rubric ratings from the CPRD report for the domain criteria. Give as much detail as possible within the space limitations.

***Redesignation Applications (only): Be sure to describe how your school has addressed the feedback given on your previous STW visit and new initiatives you have put in place since your last STW designation.***

- Academic Excellence (1-2 pages)
- Development Responsiveness (1-2 pages)
- Social Equity (1-2 pages)
- Organizational Structures and Processes (1-2 pages)

#### **B. Plans for the future**

Write an additional 1 to 2 pages explaining your school’s plans for the future. How will your school maintain your upward trajectory? Please include the following:

- Identified priority need areas, action plans, anticipated outcomes, and expected support from the upper administration, and,
- Steps the school/district intends to take in the future to orient and acclimate new staff to ensure they are familiar with the STW program and the culture and expectations of the school.

**Save the finished narrative as a PDF (example:  
2025CAYourSchoolNameNarrative.pdf).**

## Submission

(a) Upload ALL supporting documents via the [2025 Schools to Watch Application Uploads](#)  
**Be sure all files are complete and named correctly before beginning the upload process.**

(b) [Email Scott Steele](#), California Schools to Watch Director, informing him you have uploaded all documents (and therefore submitted your application).

## APPLICATION CHECKLIST

Mark the checklist to make sure you did these steps:

<input type="checkbox"/>	All certificated staff completed the rubric online.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The rubric report from CPRD was incorporated into the narrative.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The narrative, demographics, writing team, assurances, addendum, and dashboard documents were all uploaded via the <b>2025 Schools to Watch Application Uploads</b> portal.
<input type="checkbox"/>	We emailed Scott Steele after we uploaded all the documents.
<input type="checkbox"/>	We heard back from CLE that all our documents are accessible to CLE and our submission has been verified.

**Congratulations, it's done!**

All materials must be submitted by **Tuesday, October 1, 2024, 11:59pm PT**. CLE will respond to each school within one week of submission. Please submit early if possible.