

North Carolina Portrait of a Graduate and DESSA Crosswalk

Prepared October 2022

North Carolina's Portrait of a Graduate identifies necessary skills for graduates of North Carolina schools. Schools and districts in North Carolina might consider using the DESSA to measure student growth in these skills. The DESSA is a standardized, norm-referenced behavior rating scale that aligns with CASEL's competencies. The DESSA assesses the social and emotional competencies of students in kindergarten to grade 12. It can be completed by teachers, guardians, and out of school time staff in about 5-8 minutes. The DESSA is strength-based; the items focus on positive social and emotional skills.

The DESSA is organized into subscales that provide information about eight social and emotional competencies. These competencies include:

1. **Self-awareness:** a child's realistic understanding of their strengths and limitations and consistent desire for self-improvement;
2. **Social-awareness:** a child's capacity to interact with others in a way that shows respect for their ideas and behaviors, recognizes their impact on them, and uses cooperation and tolerance in social situations;
3. **Self-management:** a child's success in controlling their emotions and behaviors, to complete a task or succeed in a new or challenging situation;
4. **Goal-directed behavior:** a child's initiation of and persistence in completing tasks of varying difficulty;
5. **Relationship skills:** a child's consistent performance of socially acceptable actions that promote and maintain positive connections with others;
6. **Personal responsibility:** a child's tendency to be careful and reliable in their actions and in contributing to group efforts;
7. **Decision making:** an approach to problem solving that involves learning from others and from their previous experiences, using values to guide action, and accepting responsibility for decisions;
8. **Optimistic thinking:** an attitude of confidence, hopefulness, and positive thinking regarding themselves and their life situations in the past, present, and future.

Table 1. Alignment Between North Carolina’s Portrait of a Graduate and Aperture’s Competencies with Example DESSA Items

Note. SA = Self-Awareness, SM = Self-Management, SO = Social Awareness, RS = Relationship Skills, DM = Decision-Making, GB = Goal-Directed Behavior, PR = Personal Responsibility, OT = Optimistic Thinking

		Aperture Competencies							
Competency	Indicator	SA	SM	SO	RS	DM	GB	PR	OT
Adaptability	Demonstrate agility in thought processes and problem-solving.	X	X						X
	Accept feedback, praise, setbacks, and criticism.	X	X					X	
	Balance diverse viewpoints and beliefs to reach workable solutions.		X	X	X				
	Demonstrate flexibility when navigating challenging situations.	X	X			X			
	Exhibit steadfastness despite difficulty, opposition, and/or failure.	X	X			X			X
Example DESSA Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask questions to clarify what they did not understand? (SA) • Stay calm when faced with a challenge? (SM) • Get along with different types of people? (SO) • Show appreciation of others? (RS) • Accept responsibility for what they did? (DM) • Act as a leader in a peer group? (PR) • Say good things about their classmates? (OT) 								

		Aperture Competencies							
Competency	Indicator	SA	SM	SO	RS	DM	GB	PR	OT
Collaboration	Contribute and respond to diverse perspectives to achieve a common goal.			X	X		X		
	Leverage strengths to resolve conflict and foster teamwork.	X	X		X				X
	Interact respectfully with others in digital and in-person interactions.		X		X			X	
	Embrace a variety of roles in a group as a participant and a leader.			X	X	X			
Example DESSA Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show an awareness of their personal strengths? (SA) • Think before they acted? (SM) • Get along with different types of people? (SO) • Offer to help somebody? (RS) • Use available resources (people or objects) to solve a problem? (DM) • Take steps to achieve goals? (GB) • Encourage positive behavior in others? (PR) • Say good things about their classmates? (OT) 								

Aperture Competencies										
Competency	Indicator	SA	SM	SO	RS	DM	GB	PR	OT	
Communication	Articulate thoughts and ideas effectively using oral, written, and nonverbal communication skills.		X			X				
	Listen to and decipher meaning, values, attitudes, and intentions.	X		X	X	X				
	Ask questions and synthesize messages to seek understanding.	X		X	X	X				
	Engage in productive discourse to resolve disagreements.		X	X	X					
	Craft communication for a range of purposes and audiences.		X	X		X				
	Use storytelling and public speaking to express ideas and connect with others.		X	X	X					
Example DESSA Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask questions to clarify what they did not understand? (SA) • Think before they acted? (SM) • Get along with different types of people? (SO) • Show appreciation of others? (RS) • Show good judgment? (DM) 									

Aperture Competencies										
Competency	Indicator	SA	SM	SO	RS	DM	GB	PR	OT	
Critical Thinking	Analyze, assess, and reconstruct personal thought processes.	X	X			X		X		
	Apply thinking that is clear, rational, and evidence-based.	X	X			X		X		
	Evaluate and prioritize solutions to difficult or complex problems.					X	X	X		
	Employ creative improvements to systems, processes, and organizations.					X		X		
Example DESSA Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make accurate statements about events in their life (him/herself)? (SA) • Stay focused despite a problem or distraction? (SM) • Show good judgment? (DM) • Take steps to achieve goals? (GB) • Show care when doing a project or schoolwork? (PR) 									

Aperture Competencies									
Competency	Indicator	SA	SM	SO	RS	DM	GB	PR	OT
Empathy	Demonstrate understanding, sensitivity, concern, and respect.		X	X	X				
	Share in others' feelings, opinions, and experiences through personal and digital connections.		X	X	X				
	Value and embrace diverse cultures and unique perspectives.		X	X	X				
	Foster belonging and trust through mutual respect and dialogue.		X	X	X				
Example DESSA Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay focused despite a problem or distraction? (SM) • Respect another person's opinion? (SO) • Respond to another person's feelings? (RS) 								

Aperture Competencies									
Competency	Indicator	SA	SM	SO	RS	DM	GB	PR	OT
Learner's Mindset	Possess an ongoing desire to learn, unlearn, and relearn.						X		X
	Embrace curiosity to experience new ideas, demonstrate growth, and persist through challenges.					X	X		X
	Translate knowledge to provide different contexts to drive change and innovation.		X						
	Develop positive attitudes and beliefs about learning.		X			X			X
Example DESSA Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay calm when faced with a challenge? (SM) • Show good judgment? (DM) • Try to do their best? (GB) • Express high expectations for himself/herself? (OT) 								

		Aperture Competencies								
Competency	Indicator	SA	SM	SO	RS	DM	GB	PR	OT	
Personal Responsibility	Adhere to a set of core values that are evident in choices and actions.					X		X		
	Earn trust and respect through honest, principled behaviors.				X	X		X		
	Honor commitments.		X			X		X		
	Recognize how personal decisions and actions have impacts beyond self.	X		X		X		X		
	Take ownership of decisions and persevere through challenges.		X			X		X	X	
	Demonstrate self-control and composure.	X	X			X		X		
Example DESSA Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask somebody for feedback? (SA; K-8 & HSE) • Stay focused despite a problem or distraction? (SM) • Get along with different types of people? (SO) • Show appreciation of others? (RS) • Accept responsibility for what they did? (DM) • Remember important information? (PR) • Speak about positive things? (OT) 									



Aperture Education empowers over 3,000 schools and out-of-school-time programs across North America to measure, strengthen, and support social and emotional competence in K-12 youth and educators. This system enables education leaders to make strategic, data-based decisions about SEL within their organizations. The Aperture system includes the DESSA suite of strength-based assessments, CASEL-aligned intervention strategies, and robust reporting, all in one easy-to-use digital platform. Aperture has supported over one million students in their social and emotional growth and continues to develop innovative solutions to bring the whole child into focus. To learn more, visit www.ApertureEd.com.