

Washington Portrait of a Graduate and DESSA Crosswalk

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Washington State's Portrait of a Graduate identifies necessary skills for graduates of Washington schools. Schools and districts in Washington 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 Washington’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. This table uses the standards outlined for students in grades 6 to 8; however, the DESSA alignment is consistent for all grade bands.

		Aperture Competencies							
Competency	Indicator	SA	SM	SO	RS	DM	GB	PR	OT
Cultivates Personal Growth & Knowledge	Shows confidence	X							X
	Applies Learning					X	X		
	Sets personally meaningful goals					X	X		
Example DESSA Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show an awareness of their personal strengths? (SA) • Take steps to achieve goals? (GB) • Shows good judgment? (DM) • Express high expectations for themselves? (OT) 								

		Aperture Competencies							
Competency	Indicator	SA	SM	SO	RS	DM	GB	PR	OT
Solves Problems	Thinks critically	X	X					X	
	Demonstrates resilience		X				X	X	X
	Embraces creativity			X	X				
Example DESSA Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask somebody for feedback? (SA) • Think before they acted? (SM) • Get along with different types of people? (SO) • Show appreciation of others? (RS) • Learn from experience? (DM) • Seek out challenging tasks? (GB) • Express high expectations for themselves? (OT) 								

Aperture Competencies										
Competency	Indicator	SA	SM	SO	RS	DM	GB	PR	OT	
Communicates Effectively	Works on a team		X	X	X					
	Collaborates	X		X	X					
	Navigates conflict			X	X	X				
Example DESSA Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach another person to do something? (SA) • Adjust well when going from one setting to another? (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) 									

Aperture Competencies										
Competency	Indicator	SA	SM	SO	RS	DM	GB	PR	OT	
Sustains Wellness	Cultivates physical and emotional well-being	X							X	
	Fosters empathy			X	X					
	Builds relationships			X	X					
Example DESSA Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show an awareness of their personal strengths? (SA) • Respect another person's opinions? (SO) • Show appreciation of others? (RS) • Say good things about themselves? (OT) 									

Aperture Competencies									
Competency	Indicator	SA	SM	SO	RS	DM	GB	PR	OT
Embraces Differences/ Diversity	Participates in community			X	X	X			
	Promotes global responsibility			X	X			X	
	Shows cultural competency			X	X	X			
Example DESSA Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to group efforts? (SO) • Express concern for another person? (RS) • Encourage positive behavior in others? (PR) • Accept responsibility for what they did? (DM) 								

Aperture Competencies									
Competency	Indicator	SA	SM	SO	RS	DM	GB	PR	OT
Masters Life Skills/ Self-Agency	Takes initiative	X		X				X	
	Understands financial and digital literacy					X			
	Accesses resources					X	X		
Example DESSA Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show an awareness of their personal strengths? (SA) • Contribute to group efforts? (SO) • Use available resources (people or objects) to solve a problem? (DM) • Seek out additional knowledge or information? (GB) • Act as a leader in a peer group? (PR) 								



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.