The Aperture Education Guide to Data-Driven SEL

A Multi-Tiered Systems of Support Approach to Develop Students' Social and Emotional Competence

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Introduction

This guide was developed for K-8 school teams using the Aperture System to support their students' social and emotional learning (SEL). The guide outlines the process for data-driven SEL within a multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) framework. The purpose of this guide is to help educators access, review, and *use the data* from the Aperture System to inform their SEL programs and to build the social and emotional competence of all students.

Setting the Stage for Data-Driven SEL

This guide is targeted for school-level SEL implementation, and assumes the following components of Universal SEL programming are in place:

✓ A strength-based approach to SEL that has been communicated to all stakeholders, including students and parents.

✓ A school-level SEL team that includes stakeholders as partners and representatives in SEL decision making.

✓ Evidence-based SEL programming.

✓ All users have been trained on DESSA ratings and reports.

If you are not yet at this point, then you are encouraged to review the resources listed below that support getting started with SEL:

1. CASEL Guide to Schoolwide Social Emotional Learning

2. Navigating SEL from the Inside Out

3. CASEL Program Guide

The Aperture System

The Aperture System delivers the DESSA assessments and provides robust reporting in an easy-to-use digital platform. The Aperture System, Foundational Practices, and Growth Strategies can be used as part of an effective, data-driven, school-wide SEL program. The Aperture System includes the DESSA-mini and the DESSA, measures of social and emotional competence that can be used for screening, assessing, planning, monitoring, and evaluating students' social and emotional competencies. The DESSA is CASEL aligned, as shown in Figure 1.

The **DESSA-mini** (Naglieri et al., 2011) is an eight-item screener of student social and emotional competence. The results produce a Social-Emotional Total (SET) score that provides an indication of a student's overall social and emotional competence at the time of assessment. The results can be aggregated and viewed at different levels (e.g., student, classroom, group, grade, or school) to help educators plan how best to strengthen, adjust, or add universal supports. This screener can also help to identify students that may benefit from additional assessment. The four alternate forms of the DESSA-mini can be used for ongoing progress monitoring throughout the school year.

The **DESSA** (LeBuffe et al., 2014) is a 72-item assessment that provides a score for each of eight social and emotional competencies (see Figure 1) and one total score (i.e., the "Social and Emotional Composite" or "SEC" score) per student that provides an indication of overall SEC at the time of assessment. DESSA data can help educators plan how best to strengthen, adjust, or add universal and tiered supports in specific areas. The results can also be aggregated and viewed at different levels.

Figure 1. Social and emotional competencies assessed by the DESSA

Both the DESSA-mini and the DESSA report results using a *T*-score. *T*-scores are reported on a scale in which a score of 50 is the mean (i.e., average), and standard deviations are 10 points. As strength-based measures, higher *T*-scores mean a higher level of SEC. *T*-scores are categorized into three descriptive ranges in which scores of 60 and above are considered a strength; scores between 41-59 are considered typical; and scores of 40 and below indicate a need for instruction.

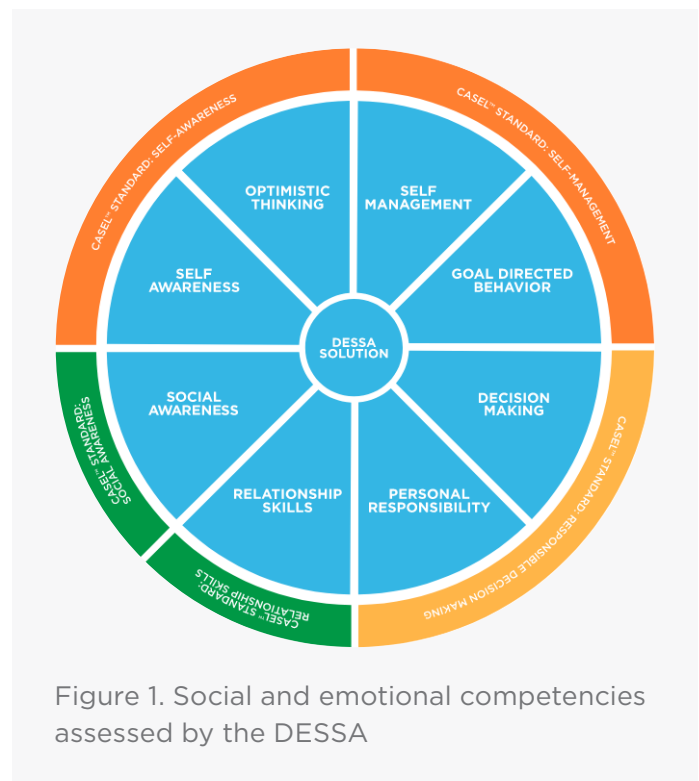Within the Aperture System, there are **Foundational Practices**, a set of classroom routines and best

practices that establish a positive learning environment. The Aperture System also includes **Growth Strategies** that provide actionable ways for educators to help their students improve social and emotional skills. Strategies are provided at different grade levels and tiers of support. Each strategy targets one or more of the eight SEC assessed by the DESSA.

The components of the **Aperture System** are designed for use in a sequenced and coordinated manner within an MTSS framework that includes the following components:

- **Screen.** Administer the DESSA-mini to all students.

- **Assess.** Administer the DESSA to students whose DESSA-mini results show a need for instruction.

- **Grow.** Use the DESSA data and reports to review, select, and incorporate Foundational Practices and Growth Strategies into SEL instruction at universal, targeted, and individual levels.

- **Progress monitor.** Monitor social and emotional growth and change in response to SEL instruction and adjust instruction as needed.

- **Evaluate outcomes.** Evaluate social and emotional growth and change from the beginning to the end of the school year and use the information to guide continuous quality improvement efforts for SEL programming.

Implementing the DESSA-mini and DESSA

It is important that school SEL teams have a plan for implementing the DESSA-mini and the DESSA. A coordinated plan will help ensure that your school gets the most out of the data provided by these assessments. Figure 2 outlines a recommended timeline for using the DESSA-mini and the DESSA. The process outlined in Figure 2 represents a best practice model, and schools can adapt this process depending on their specific needs.

To implement the DESSA-mini and DESSA according to this timeline, teachers need to be prepared to complete their ratings, SEL teams must have a plan for administering the DESSA, and there needs to be a schoolwide plan to review and respond to the data.

The checklist below is designed for school or SEL team leaders. This checklist focuses on the planning, administrative, and logistical aspects of implementation. The schedule for when these items will be completed should be determined and communicated *prior to the beginning* of the school year to ensure that staff are adequately prepared for completing DESSA-mini and DESSA ratings. For planning purposes, note that the DESSA-mini ratings take approximately 1 minute to complete per student. The DESSA ratings take approximately 5-8 minutes to complete per student.

October
Universal screening with DESSA-mini

Students in **Typical & Strength** Ranges

Students in **Need for Instruction** Range

Follow-up assessment with DESSA (optional)

Ongoing universal SEL instruction

Ongoing universal & targeted SEL instruction informed by DESSA data (optional)

Dec ➜ March
Optional midyear check-in with alternate form of DESSA-mini

Dec ➜ March
Midyear progress monitoring

May/June
Universal program evaluation with DESSA-mini

May/June
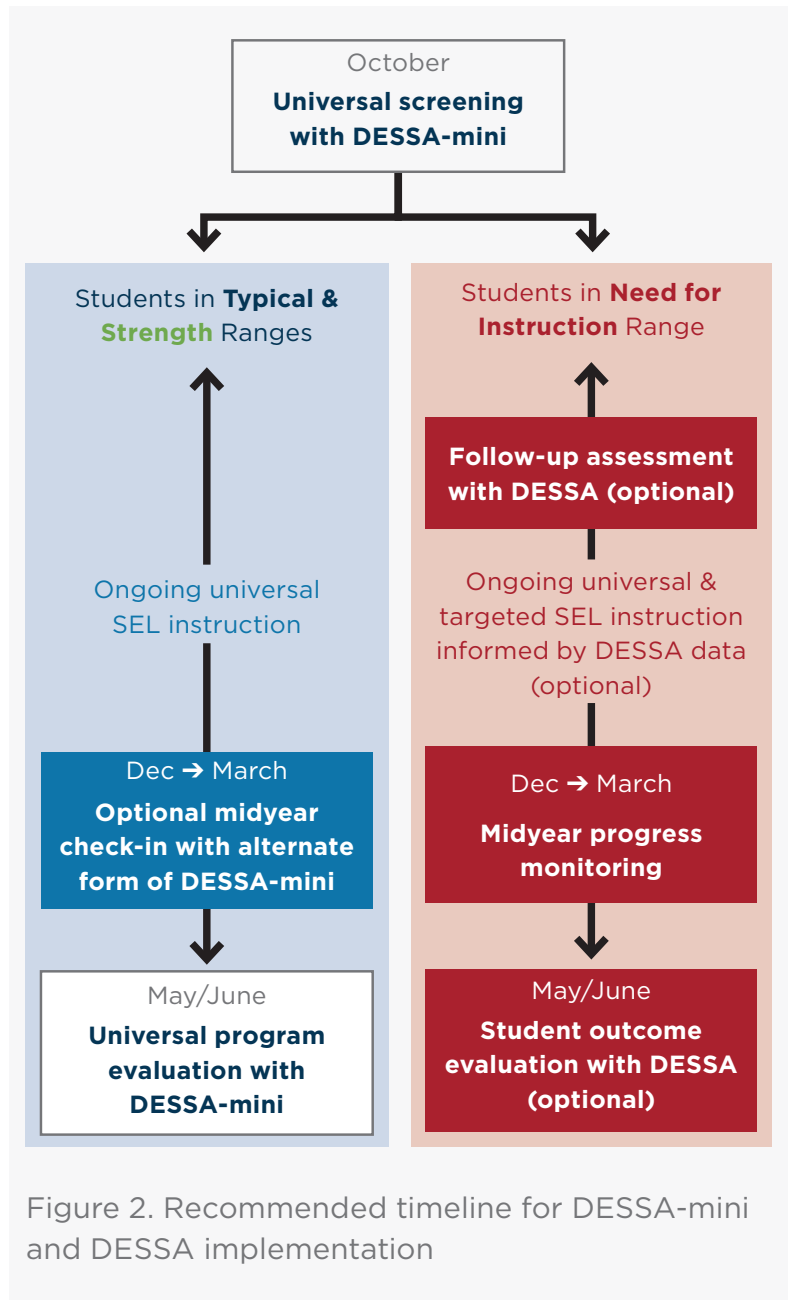**Student outcome evaluation with DESSA (optional)**

Figure 2. Recommended timeline for DESSA-mini and DESSA implementation

SEL Team Leader Planning for DESSA Implementation Checklist*

- ☐ 1. Ensure that teachers have training on the DESSA. Training should include how to complete the DESSA-mini and the DESSA, as well as how to review and understand results.

- ☐ 2. Designate a rating window for your first rating about 4-6 weeks after school start.

- ☐ 3. Provide time for teachers to complete DESSA-mini ratings. For example, some sites designate a common time/day or period to ensure all ratings are completed.

- ☐ 4. Schedule and provide time for teachers to complete DESSA ratings for students who demonstrate a need for instruction.

- ☐ 5. Create a process and coordinate the review of DESSA-mini results at school, grade, and class levels.

- ☐ 6. Schedule time to review DESSA results.

- ☐ 7. Schedule mid-year ratings (see Figure 2) for the DESSA-mini and DESSA. Schedule a reminder to teachers 4-6 weeks prior so they are prepared to complete their ratings.

- ☐ 8. Schedule end-of-year ratings. Schedule a reminder to teachers 4-6 weeks prior so they are prepared to complete their ratings.

- ☐ 9. Schedule time to review, reflect on, and share results with stakeholders.

*When determining raters for middle school students, the individual who knows the student the best should provide the DESSA rating. This individual will vary from school to school. For example, if the school has an advisory period, that teacher would be a good choice. Another option for determining raters is to select the individual who has the most opportunity to observe the student engaged in the behaviors included on the DESSA.

Teachers should also prepare for DESSA-mini and DESSA implementation to ensure that the assessment is administered as intended and to facilitate the use of the results. The *Teacher Planning Checklist* includes a detailed set of steps to support teachers' preparation for completing their DESSA ratings.

Teacher Planning for DESSA Implementation Checklist

☐ 1. Attend and complete the Introduction to the Aperture Systems for Educators Training and Analyzing Data in the Aperture Systems Educators Training.

☐ 2. Become familiar with the DESSA-mini and DESSA items. You might also consider rating someone you know (or a fictional character) for practice.

☐ 3. Plan your observations strategically- what activities provide opportunities to observe the skills included in the DESSA? (e.g., building in small-group activities gives students the opportunity to cooperate, contribute to a group, etc.)

☐ 4. Make sure you have blocked time to complete your ratings- your school SEL team might have a schoolwide schedule or may provide a 'window' of time to complete ratings. Be sure you dedicate time for completing your ratings.

☐ 5. Schedule time to review your classroom DESSA-mini results.

☐ 6. Schedule time to complete DESSA ratings for students who demonstrate a need for instruction.

☐ 7. Schedule time to review DESSA results for the students you rated.

☐ 8. Use the DESSA results to guide classroom, group, or individual student SEL instruction (more information about how to do this is included in this guide).

Using the Aperture System for Multi-Tiered SEL Programming

MTSS is a prevention-focused approach to education that addresses the needs of all students through data-driven systems and services. Figure 3 illustrates how the Aperture System can be used to inform SEL programming within an MTSS framework.

The Aperture System provides several reports at the student, classroom, group, grade, and school levels. These reports allow educators to develop goals and use the Growth Strategies to differentiate instruction to help all students build the social and emotional competencies (SECs) students need to be successful.
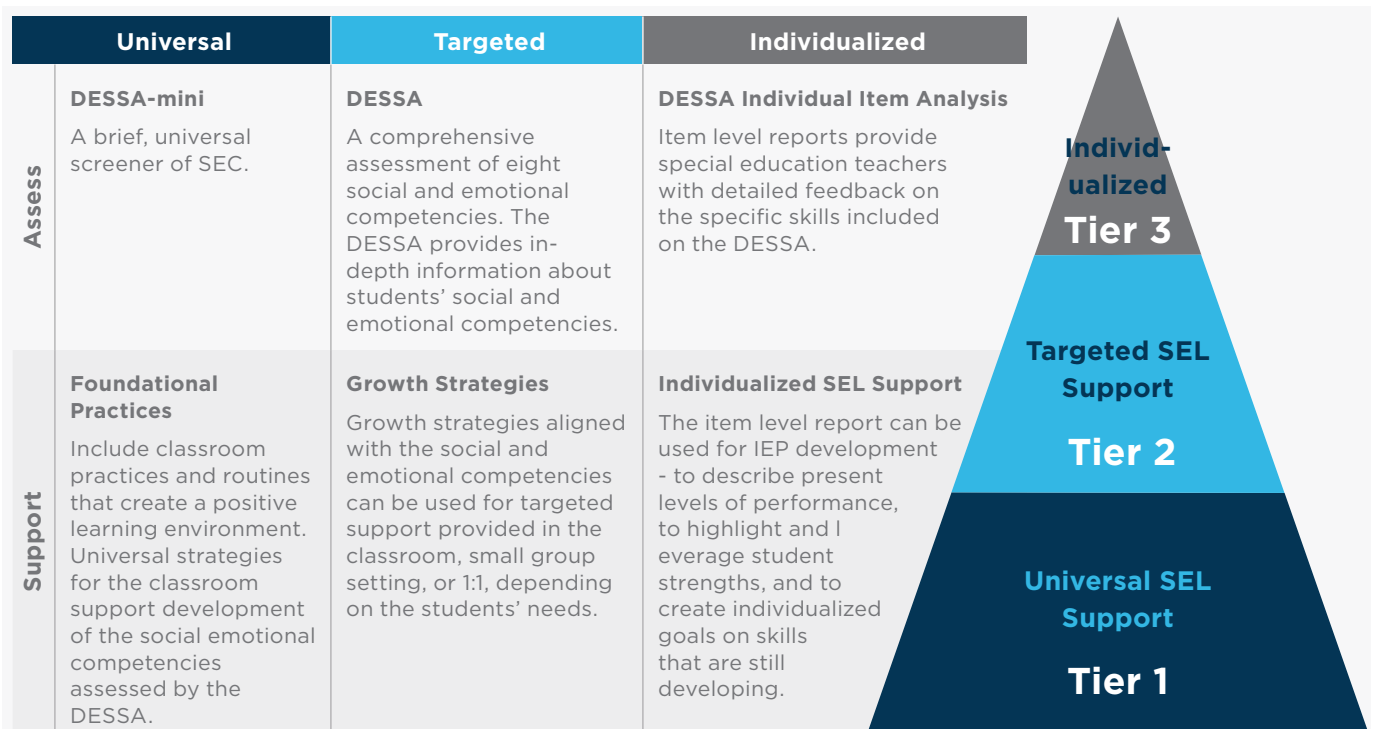
	Universal	Targeted	Individualized	
Assess	**DESSA-mini** A brief, universal screener of SEC.	**DESSA** A comprehensive assessment of eight social and emotional competencies. The DESSA provides in-depth information about students' social and emotional competencies.	**DESSA Individual Item Analysis** Item level reports provide special education teachers with detailed feedback on the specific skills included on the DESSA.	**Individ-ualized** **Tier 3**
Support	**Foundational Practices** Include classroom practices and routines that create a positive learning environment. Universal strategies for the classroom support development of the social emotional competencies assessed by the DESSA.	**Growth Strategies** Growth strategies aligned with the social and emotional competencies can be used for targeted support provided in the classroom, small group setting, or 1:1, depending on the students' needs.	**Individualized SEL Support** The item level report can be used for IEP development - to describe present levels of performance, to highlight and l everage student strengths, and to create individualized goals on skills that are still developing.	**Targeted SEL Support** **Tier 2** **Universal SEL Support** **Tier 1**

Figure 3: The Aperture System aligns with a MTSS framework.

Universal (Tier 1) - Universal SEL programming includes strategies and practices shown to be effective for the student population and educational context. Effective universal SEL ensures positive school climate and conditions for learning.

Targeted (Tier 2) - Targeted SEL is provided for students who need support in addition to the universal SEL program. SEL teams and teachers select or design interventions and supports that have demostrated positive effects for desired outcomes and are aligned with student needs.

Individualized (Tier 3) - Students with significant needs may be best served through an individualized approach. Individualized supports should be designed, implemented, and monitored using a data-driven process to identify a student's unique strengths and needs.

Universal Screening and Programming

Universal (Tier 1) SEL programming is the most efficient way to proactively build the social and emotional competence of all students. Universal school SEL programming leads to a broad range of positive outcomes including improved academic performance, positive relationships, and reduced emotional and behavioral problem behaviors (Durlak et al., 2022).

The Aperture System includes a set of Foundational Practices (see Figure 4) that provides school teams with ideas on the universal practices they can implement to support their students' social and emotional development.

There is also a set of Growth Strategies included in the Aperture System organized by the specific social and emotional competency. Growth Strategies can be used by themselves, or they can supplement a school's SEL program. Figure 5 includes a screen shot of the Growth Strategies for several of the social and emotional competencies within the Aperture System. SEL teams and educators can select the competency of interest and will have access to multiple strategies that target that competency. Growth strategies can be used at the Universal, Targeted, and Individualized levels of support.
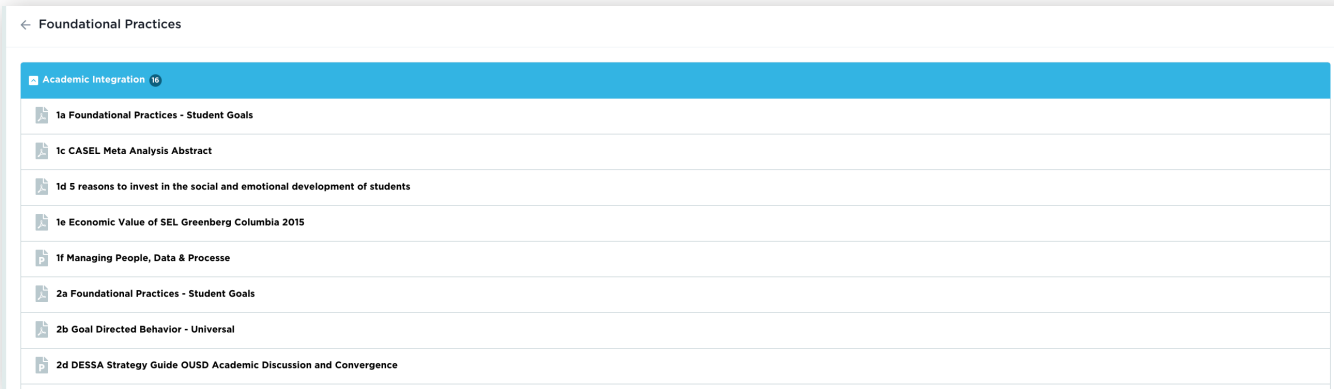

Figure 4. Foundational Practices included in the Aperture System
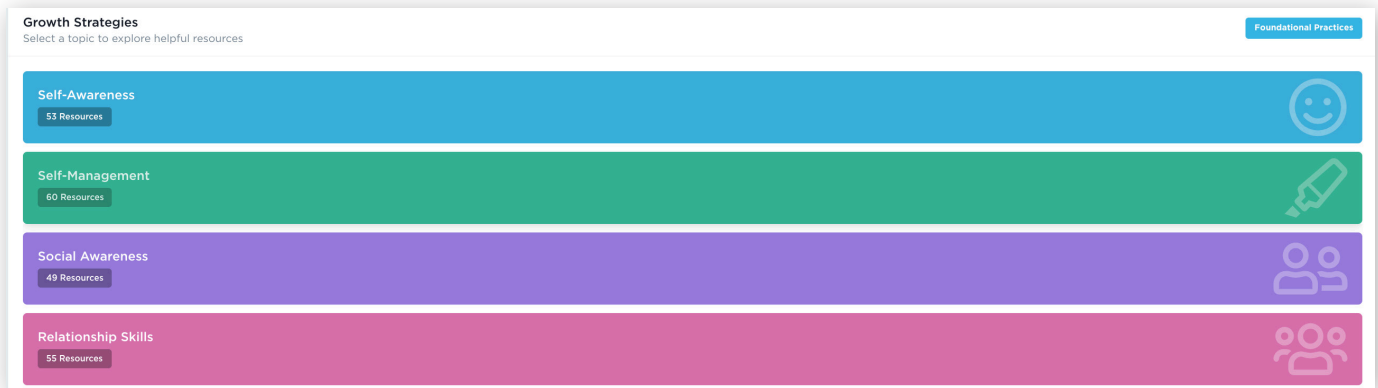
Figure 5. Growth Strategies included in the Aperture System

Universal screening with the DESSA-mini can inform Tier 1 SEL programming in multiple ways. As a screening and progress monitoring tool with four unique forms, it is recommended that the DESSA-mini be administered between three to four times during the school year. The first rating window should not occur until teachers have spent four weeks or longer with their students so that there is sufficient opportunity for teachers to get to know their students.

After each rating period, schools should engage in a data-review process, illustrated in Figure 6, that includes: 1) accessing the data, 2) reviewing the data, 3) acting on the data, and 4) continued progress monitoring.

1. Access the Data

Once an educator completes DESSA-mini ratings, the results will be available to them immediately. There is a *Site Leader Reports Guide* in the Aperture Support Portal that illustrates the various reports available within the Aperture System and how to generate them.

For educators, results will be available for students they have rated in their classrooms or programs. Higher levels of aggregated results (e.g., grade or school) are typically available to program administrators.
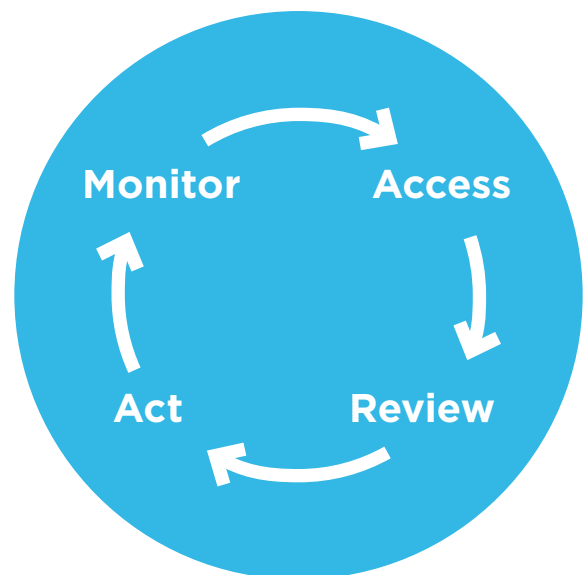

Figure 6. Recommended data review process

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2. Review and Reflect on the Data

Data review includes looking at the results at the school, grade, group, classroom, and student levels. The review process should include SEL Team members, educators, and other key stakeholders. School SEL teams should dedicate sufficient time for data review.

At each level (e.g., school, grade, class, student), the SEL team should follow a review process as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. *Suggested Process for SEL Teams to Review Universal Screening Results*

Review initial screening data using the following steps as a guide.	Data Sources
1. Review DESSA-mini universal screening overall results – check the percentage of students in strength, typical, need* for instruction categories. Expected distribution is 16 – 68 - 16	My Students Report
a. By grade/class - are there any grades or classroom level reports that differ significantly (in either positive or negative ways) from the school report?	Grade Level Report
b. By student population - are there differences in results based on racial/ethnic, gender, student service (e.g., EL, SPED) groups? Use the Guiding Questions for Review of Disaggregated Data to reflect on disaggregated results.	Grade Level Report
c. For students whose results suggest a need for instruction, review individual student level data; these students should be assessed with the DESSA to receive more in-depth information about their specific SEL needs	My Students Report
2. If results are consistent with the expected distribution at the school, grade, and classroom level or with your school's continuous improvement plan, celebrate your team's accomplishments! Then continue with your SEL implementation and repeat this process during the next screening period.	DESSA-Mini norms (16 – 68 – 16); School continuous improvement plan
3. If the results are not consistent expected results, work with your SEL team to:	
a. Collect additional data to better understand the situation	Observations; Other student behavioral, academic, engagement data; Implementation data, Follow up teacher conversations
b. Review results to determine how best to provide support. For example, teachers may need professional development, or SEL program implementation may require more support/resources.	SEL program implementation data, Teacher conversations, PLC information
c. If your results indicate significantly more students demonstrating a need, you may choose to assess students with very low SET *T*-scores (35 and below) first and create support plans as needed, then move on to students with SET *T*-scores in the 36 to 40 range.	Rating export of DESSA-Mini data sorted by SEC *T*-score
d. Create a plan or goal to address any areas of growth you have discovered.	

Review Disaggregated Data. SEL programming should be implemented with the goal of supporting educational equity. To learn whether SEL programming is supporting equitable outcomes, data should also be disaggregated into subgroups (e.g., grade level report, race/ethnicity, academic services, and economic need) and reviewed. Once data have been disaggregated, the SEL team should engage in a review process as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Guiding questions to review disaggregated data

Questions to consider as you review disaggregated data	Data Sources
1. For each subgroup of interest – check the percentage of students in strength, typical, need for instruction categories. Expected distribution is 16 – 68 - 16. *Note that currently you will need to run and print/download the report for each group to manually compare across groups.*	My Students Report
2. By student population - are there differences in results based on racial/ethnic, gender, student service (e.g., EL, SPED) groups?	Grade Level Report
3. Do disaggregated results suggest a need for reflection, discussion, or possibly professional development?	Guiding Questions for Educators
4. What supports are in place for this group of students?	
5. Do disaggregated results suggest differential instructional supports may be needed in the context of universal programming to support certain groups of students?	

Reflect on the Data

At the universal level, discussions about the data should focus on the SEL team's efforts to create a positive learning environment and provide high quality SEL instruction for all students. The reflection process should include SEL Team members and other key stakeholders who will create goals and a related action plan for continuous quality improvement (CQI).

If the DESSA-mini results at the universal level (aggregated and disaggregated) are consistent with the expected distribution, your goals, and your continuous improvement plan, celebrate your team's efforts, continue with your SEL implementation, and repeat this process next screening period.

If there are areas to improve, consider the following questions as a team to identify next steps for improving your universal programming.

Questions to Guide Improvement of Universal SEL Programming

1. Has universal, evidence-based SEL programming been implemented?

2. Have adequate resources been provided to support SEL programming (e.g., budget, professional learning, and dedicated time for instruction and practice)?

3. Is the SEL program implementation assessed regularly using an implementation rubric, and is the information used for continuous quality improvement?

4. How is your school working to ensure equitable SEL outcomes?

3. Act on the Data

Once you have reflected on your data, it is time to set goals, create an action plan, and then execute that plan. Goal setting based on DESSA results is essential. SEL teams should set universal programming implementation goals and goals for improving student outcomes as measured by the DESSA. An action plan template is included in the Appendix.

4. Monitor Progress

Progress monitoring at the universal level lets you know whether your SEL programming is effective. To monitor progress, you will look at the SET *T*-score at the school, grade, class and student levels to see whether and how much they are changing over time. You will also review disaggregated data so you can determine whether growth is equitable for different groups of students. Then, you can reflect on whether the actions you have taken through your SEL programming support reaching the goals you have developed.

Aperture Education recommends the process illustrated in Figure 7 for ongoing progress monitoring. As shown in Figure 7, all students are screened with the DESSA-mini at the beginning of the year. Students whose DESSA-mini results indicate a need for instruction are assessed with the DESSA. Mid-year and end of year, students are screened with the DESSA-mini, and students with a need for instruction are assessed with the DESSA. This way, schools can evaluate the growth and change in their universal program across the school year.
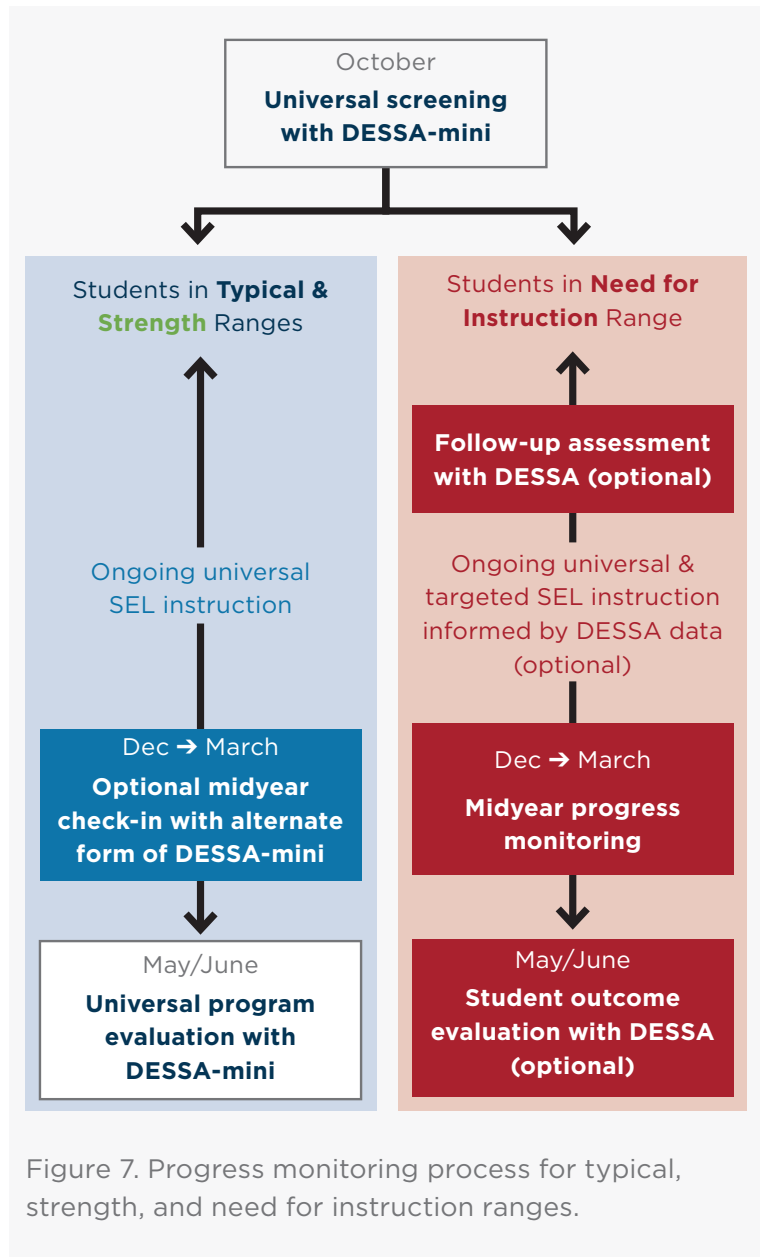

Figure 7. Progress monitoring process for typical, strength, and need for instruction ranges.

The Impact Report allows you to compare the progress of students from one rating to the next in strength, typical, need for instruction categories. The Student Movement feature provides specific information on how many students from a given category (e.g., need for instruction) moved to a different category (e.g., typical, strength) between ratings.

A school SEL team should also run the Impact Report by student population (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, special populations) and review the results of disaggregated data across groups.

Things to Consider when Reviewing Progress Monitoring Data

When looking for progress, **be patient**. Aperture recommends at least 90 days between administrations of the DESSA-mini to provide time for program instruction and practice, skill development and generalization, and opportunities to observe new and emerging behaviors.

Although the goal of SEL programming is to build students' SEC, some students could **decline**. For example, students who experience hardship or traumatic life events between assessments may show lower SEC at follow-up. Additionally, there is evidence that middle school-aged students experience a decline in SEC (Soland et al., 2022). Data provided through the Aperture System can help teams determine whether and when students need additional SEL support.

Seasonal changes may also affect students' progress. For instance, prior research has shown students may grow in SEC over the school year but decline over the summer (e.g., Lee, 2022). Therefore, expect that students may need additional instruction and time to practice skills at the start of each school year.

- **It important to identify students with declining scores and consider administering the DESSA to assess and better understand their needs.**

- **Students that do not respond to universal programming should be assessed with the DESSA and provided targeted SEL instruction as appropriate.**

- **Some sites have opted to use the DESSA to assess all their students. This gives them more detailed information about their students' social and emotional competencies to inform universal SEL programming.**

Targeted (Tier 2) Assessment and Programming Using the DESSA

Targeted SEL is designed to promote the SEL of students who need additional supports within the general classroom or in small group instruction to benefit from SEL programming. Targeted practices begin with a strong universal SEL foundation.

Many students who need targeted support can benefit from instruction on *self-awareness* and *self-management* skills. Stronger self-awareness and self-management skills help students understand when specific social and emotional skills are needed, and how to put those skills into practice (McClelland & Wanless, 2012; Montroy et al., 2014).

There are a variety of approaches for providing targeted SEL supports to students, and SEL teams should select the approach(es) that will best meet the needs of their students and that can be well-implemented given their school's resources. In this guide, we briefly outline three approaches to Targeted SEL programming.

Approaches to Targeted (Tier 2) SEL Programming

1. **Targeted Support within the General Classroom.** Not every student will require small group intervention. In fact, some students in need of instruction may be better served through targeted support within the general classroom. In this approach, a student or small group of students may have additional supports provided to help them develop their social and emotional competence. For example, a student working on self-awareness skills might be supported with visual rubrics and/or checklists that provide a model of expected behaviors. A student working on social awareness skills may be provided with a list or visual cue to guide their interactions in a small group setting, and the teacher can ensure that they closely monitor the group to provide immediate feedback and support.

2. **Social, Emotional, Behavioral Tier 2 Intervention Programs.** This approach relies on the use of published programs that have been developed specifically for use within a Tier 2 setting. Some universal SEL programs include targeted interventions. Social and behavioral Tier 2 programs are often delivered by a teacher or counselor and include additional instruction for key social, emotional, and/or behavioral skills. These programs often specify the frequency, duration, and intensity for implementation.

    It is important for schools to select programs that are:

    a. Evidence-based

    b. Aligned to the needs of students

    c. Aligned with universal programs to reinforce key skills and principles

3. **Focused Interventions.** If a school is using a universal SEL program, there may be key components of that program that could be reinforced in a small group setting. Key components include things such as teaching students how to identify and name emotions or teaching specific social skills. School teams can select the specific skills and competencies they would like to support, and then focus on these specific components as part of their targeted SEL programming efforts. Many of the Growth Strategies included in the Aperture System focus on key skills and competencies.

Tier 2 Program Resources

CASEL Program Guide

Harmony

Intensive Intervention

**The Ecological Approaches to Social Emotional Learning (EASEL) Lab**

Using the DESSA to Inform Targeted SEL Programming

As described in the Universal Screening and Programming section, students whose DESSA-mini results indicate a need for instruction should be assessed with the DESSA. The DESSA should be used to confirm screening results and to provide the SEL team with more in-depth information about students' social and emotional competence.

The DESSA typically takes between 5-8 minutes per student to complete. The SEL team will need to provide teachers with the additional time needed to complete the DESSA. The SEL team should also set timelines for completing the assessment and reviewing the data. See the implementation checklists included in the beginning of this manual.

DESSA results inform Targeted SEL Programming in a variety of ways.

1. Results can be reviewed across students within a grade or class to identify potential focal areas of instruction. For example, if results indicate that several students have similar areas of need, programs or strategies that target these competencies might be selected. In the example figure below, a team might focus on interventions that support stronger decision-making skills and that promote optimistic thinking.
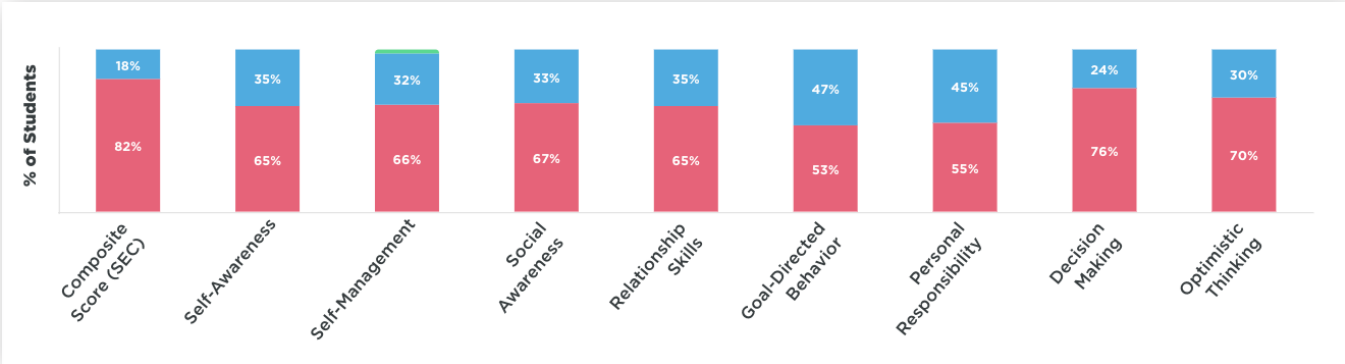
Student Breakout

	SEC	SA	SM	SO	RS	GB	PR	DM	OT
Barry, Amira	29	28	35	28	29	36	38	28	28
Santana, Ishaan	33	41	31	31	40	30	33	35	39
Byrd, Chandler	37	41	34	34	44	32	36	37	49
Wells, Joaquin	38	41	40	37	35	41	45	38	37
Potter, Baker	39	35	48	41	40	36	39	43	34
Davidson, Sterling	39	35	48	41	40	36	39	43	34
Ballard, Dillon	39	35	48	41	40	36	39	43	34
Macias, Milan	41	42	42	41	42	43	42	42	42
Clark, Kane	42	42	41	44	43	45	42	42	47
Huang, Mateo	42	42	41	44	43	45	42	42	47

🟢 Strength 🔵 Typical 🔴 Need for Instruction

2. Results can be used to create small groups. For example, students with similar needs might receive targeted instruction on that competency within a small group, and also provided the opportunity to practice skills within the general classroom setting. In the Student Breakout figure above, a school team could consider placing Baker, Sterling, and Dillon in a small group since their profiles across competencies are similar. Teachers can also pair students who have complementary competencies to encourage peer-assisted learning, structured peer feedback, and a collaborative approach to social-emotional skill development.

3. As the school year continues, data from the DESSA and/or DESSA-mini can be used to progress monitor and to evaluate the effectiveness of your targeted SEL program.

After each rating period, schools should engage in a data-review process that includes: 1) accessing the data, 2) reviewing the data, 3) acting on the data, and 4) continued progress monitoring.

1. Access the Data

Once an educator completes DESSA ratings for students who need targeted support, the results will be available to them immediately. For educators, results will be available for students they have rated in their classrooms or programs. SEL team leaders or site administrators will be able to review data at the grade and school levels.

2. Review the Data

At the beginning of the school year, DESSA data should be reviewed to make decisions about how to structure and provide targeted SEL services. The review process should include SEL Team members and key stakeholders. School SEL teams should dedicate sufficient time for data review. The length of time will depend on school characteristics (e.g., number of students in need). In subsequent rating periods, DESSA data should be reviewed to evaluate students' progress and to inform continued targeted SEL implementation. Table 4 provides a suggested process for SEL teams to review DESSA results to inform targeted SEL programming.

Table 4. *Targeted SEL Programming: Guiding Questions for Using DESSA Results*

Question 1: How can we use DESSA results to get started with Targeted (Tier 2) SEL programming?	
Review initial screening data using the following steps as a guide.	**Data Sources**
1. Review DESSA results	Impact Report; Competencies Report
a. By grade/class - are there specific social and emotional competencies for which most students demonstrate a need for instruction? Are there relative strengths that can be leveraged?	Competencies Report
b. For individual students – which students might benefit from support within the general class? Which students might need more focused, targeted intervention?	My Students Report; Observational data and team discussion
2. Consider focusing targeted interventions using one of the following approaches based on your results in step one, and that best fits your school's SEL programming model and resources.	
a. If there are select (2-3) competencies in which most students demonstrate a need for instruction, focus targeted interventions on those areas.	Competencies Report; Consult the Growth Strategies in the Aperture System for ideas on targeted intervention
b. If all/most students have a demonstrated need for instruction across most competencies, consider beginning a targeted intervention aligned with the schoolwide focus.	Competencies Report
c. Review individual student results to determine the best fit of Targeted programming options given.	My Students Report

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Question 2: Are students who are receiving Targeted SEL supports making progress?	
Review DESSA data throughout the year using the following steps.	**Data Sources**
1. Determine a progress monitoring schedule – we recommend between 3 times per year.	School SEL Implementation Plan
2. Review ongoing progress monitoring data by group. Are most students within a Targeted group making progress across competencies? In the competencies that were the focus of support?	Impact Report
a. If yes, celebrate your team's success and continue with your targeted SEL program.	
b. If no, check on targeted support implementation. Are supports delivered with fidelity? With sufficient frequency, duration, and intensity? Does the targeted program provider need training, resources, or additional support? Are the key stakeholders involved?	Observation; Attendance; Implementation records; Discuss with targeted program provider
3. Disaggregate results to determine whether there are differences in growth/ outcomes based on race/ethnicity.	Impact Report (run by subgroup)
4. Review ongoing progress monitoring data by student.	
a. Is the student demonstrating growth in the targeted social and emotional competencies? If yes, continue with targeted program supports until the student can be successful without support in the universal program.	Individual Student Report
b. If no, and you have determined the targeted program is effective for most students in the group, consider more intensive supports for the student.	Individual Student Report

Reflect on the Data

School teams should follow the review process outlined above and reflect on whether the results suggest that they are successful in providing high quality targeted SEL support. The reflection process should include SEL Team members and other key stakeholders with the goal of developing clear and actionable goals.

If the DESSA results at the targeted level (aggregated and disaggregated) are consistent with the expected distribution, your goals, and your continuous improvement plan, celebrate your team's efforts, continue with your targeted SEL implementation, and repeat this process next assessment period.

If there are areas to improve, consider the questions below to identify next steps for improving your targeted programming.

> **Questions to guide continuous quality improvement of Targeted SEL programming**
>
> 1. Has evidence-based, targeted SEL programming been implemented?
>
> 2. Have adequate resources been provided to support targeted SEL programming (e.g., budget, professional learning, and dedicated time for instruction and practice)?
>
> 3. Is the SEL program implementation assessed regularly using an implementation rubric and is the information used for continuous quality improvement?
>
> 4. How is your school working to ensure equitable SEL outcomes?

> **It is also important to consider other types of data as part of the reflection process. Information such as trends in attendance, academic performance, and conduct can help to put the DESSA results in context and prioritize action steps.**

3. Act on the Data

SEL team members should discuss the DESSA results and decide on specific and actionable goals to provide high quality, targeted SEL programming for students requiring this support.

Goal setting questions based on DESSA results include:

1. What percentage of students receiving targeted supports are currently making progress?

2. What are the decision criteria for removing targeted supports for students who have made adequate progress?

3. Do the data indicate equitable growth and outcomes for students across various student populations?

4. Have school staff received the professional development and resources needed to implement high-quality, targeted SEL programs?

Depending on the results of your data review and reflection, your SEL team may set goals to address various aspects of your targeted program. For example, your team might set a goal for more than 80% of students receiving targeted SEL support to make progress. If your team finds that very few students are making progress in the targeted program, this might suggest that it is either misaligned to student needs, or that it is not well-implemented, or a combination of both. In this case, your team might set a goal to train 100% of school staff responsible for providing targeted supports.

Your team can use the [template in the Appendix](#) to create an action plan to collect fidelity data, to review the alignment of program focus to student needs, to improve targeted outcomes and needs.
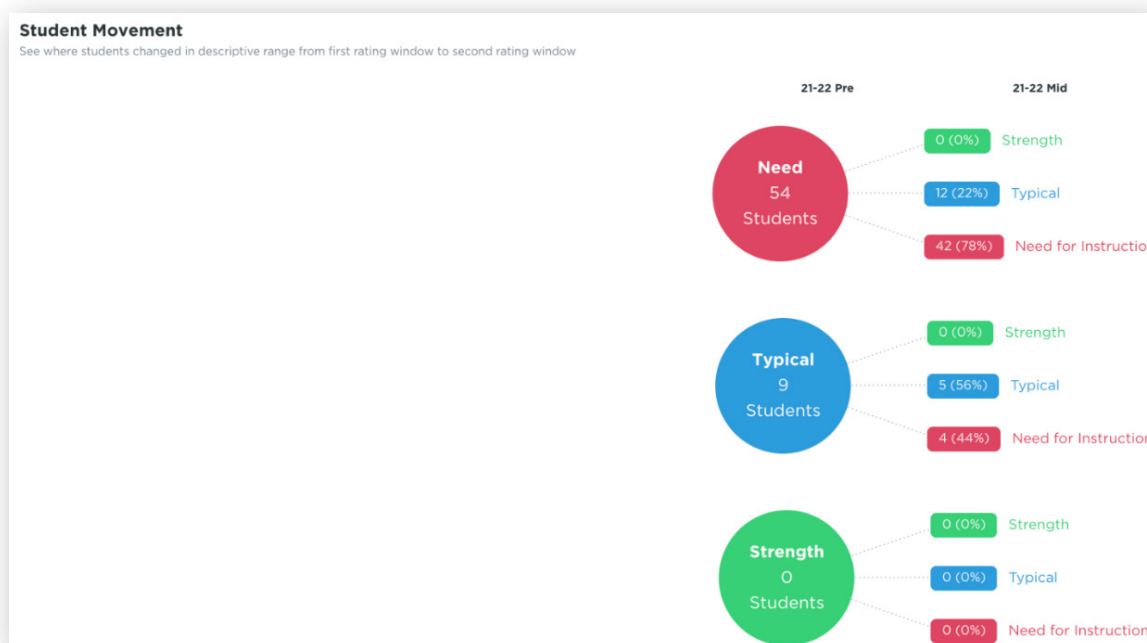
4. Monitor Progress

Progress monitoring at the targeted level lets you know whether the additional supports are working to improve student SEC. To monitor progress, you will look at the students' DESSA SEC score as well as scores across the eight competencies to see whether and how much they are changing over time. You can review these results for individual students as well as for groups of students. Then, you can reflect on whether the actions you have taken through targeted SEL programming are helping you reach your SEL goals.

The Impact Report allows you to compare the progress for groups of students from one rating to the next in strength, typical, need for instruction categories. The Impact Report displays data in several ways to inform your decision making. The Change in Students' Overall Social and Emotional Competence provides a visual comparison between two rating windows. In this example, you can see that the percentage of students receiving targeted support whose performance on the DESSA was in the typical range increased from 14 to 27%. The team may use this information to set an end of year target. For example, the team may decide to set a target for 40% of students receiving targeted support to have end of year DESSA results in the typical range.

Change in Students' Overall Social and Emotional Competence
Displays changes over time in the distribution of descriptive ranges for students
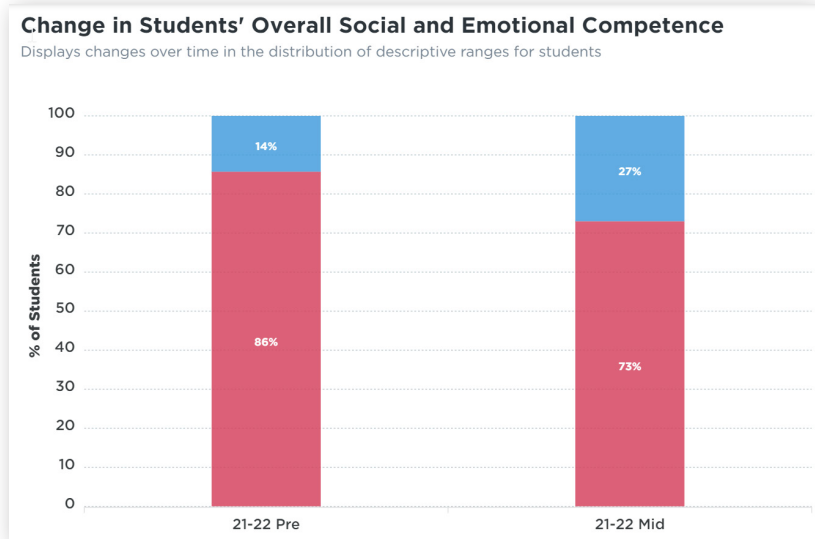
The Impact Report also provides a Student Movement graph, which indicates student movement across the strength – typical – need range. In the sample below, 12 of 54 students who had a need for instruction in the beginning of the year, were rated as typical mid-year. Four of 9 students whose performance was typical at the beginning of the year presented with a need for instruction mid-year. The students rated as typical were rated just above the cut-off point, so they were placed in targeted need for support category.

In the example provided, an SEL team might want to investigate why nearly half of the students in the typical category are now in the need category – the targeted supports provided may not be addressing students' needs.

Student Movement
See where students changed in descriptive range from first rating window to second rating window

The [Impact Report](#) includes the "Change in DESSA Social and Emotional Competencies." In the sample figure below, a team can see that the largest changes were made in the areas of self-awareness (from 49% to 75% of students in the typical category); and optimistic thinking (from 30% to 49%). If these competencies were the focus of targeted supports, the team may decide to expand the focus to include other competencies. For example, there was no change in the area of self-management – supports to help students develop these skills might be warranted.

Change in DESSA Social and Emotional Competencies
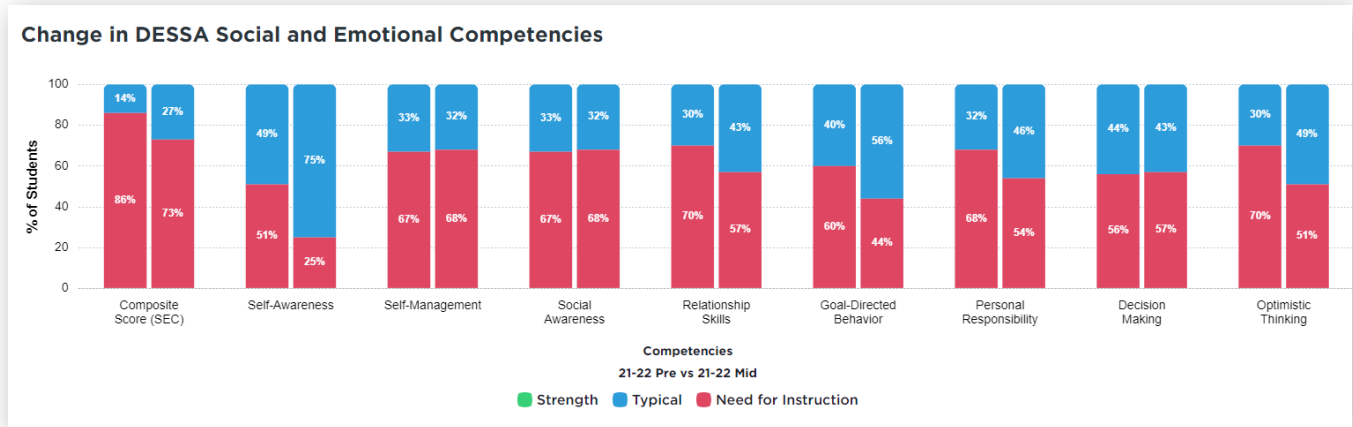
Finally, teams can review individual student progress. By looking at an individual student's results using the My Students report, a team can determine whether a specific student is making adequate progress with the targeted supports provided.

In the fictitious student example below, you can see that even though Milan's DESSA score has shifted from the need to the typical category, the score has only improved by one point, suggesting he has not made substantive gains in his SEC. The targeted program for Milan may need to be reviewed to ensure he has the support needed to develop his social and emotional competence.

Milan Macias
Fallbridge Elementary • 4th Grade • SID #3461929
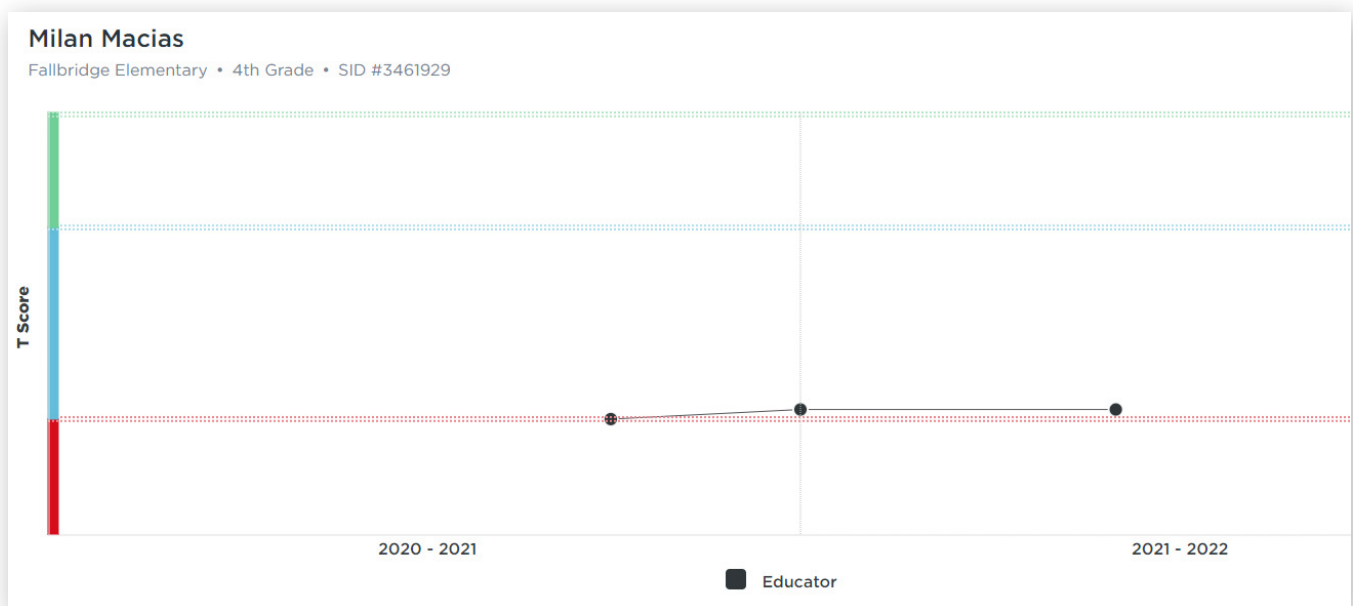
Based on a student's results, decisions can be made about whether a change in the supports provided are needed. Table 4 below provides guidance for interpreting changes in *T*-scores and guidance on whether instructional changes are needed.

Table 4. Guidance for interpreting changes in DESSA scores

Description of the Difference	Difference in *T*-score Units	Guidance
No change	Less than 2	Supports are ineffective. Review additional data (attendance, implementation fidelity, etc.) and address as needed, or try new strategies. Consult with student assistance personnel.
Small change	2 to 4, inclusive	Supports are somewhat effective. Increase frequency, duration, and/or intensity or try new strategies. If using only group strategies/supports, consider individualized strategies/supports.
Medium change	5 to 7, inclusive	
Large change	8 or more	

> **It often takes time to see sizable impacts. Large effects are tied to the use of evidence-based programming that is well-implemented.**

Individualized (Tier 3) Assessment and Programming Using the DESSA

Individualized or Tier 3, SEL programming is designed to support the unique strengths and needs of students receiving special education services. SEL supports at this level may include intensive instruction or wraparound supports provided by special education teachers, support staff, or related services personnel.

Individualized SEL programming is most effective with a strong universal SEL foundation. Individualized SEL supports can be provided across a variety of settings including the general classroom, the cafeteria, the playground, the bus, and other school settings. Additionally, it is beneficial to coordinate SEL programming with families, home environments, and out-of-school programs. This can provide the student with multiple opportunities and contexts to develop their social emotional competence and can support generalization of skills.

There are a variety of approaches for providing individualized SEL supports to students, and SEL teams should select the approach(es) designed to best meet the needs of their students. In this guide, we briefly outline two individualized SEL programming approaches and provide links to further resources in the Appendix.

Approaches to Individualized (Tier 3) SEL Programming

1. Intensive Social, Emotional, Behavioral Tier 3 Intervention Programs. This approach relies on the use of published programs that have been developed for students receiving special education services. Some universal SEL programs include intensive (Tier 3) interventions. Schools that use PBIS may also find social and behavioral Tier 3 programs that focus on key social, emotional, and/ or behavioral skills.

2. Individualized planning using DESSA results. The DESSA provides individual item analysis that can be used to create individualized plans for students. Strength-based approaches can foster more positive learning environments for students, can lead to more positive relationships with families, and can even improve programming outcomes. This process is explained more in the following section.
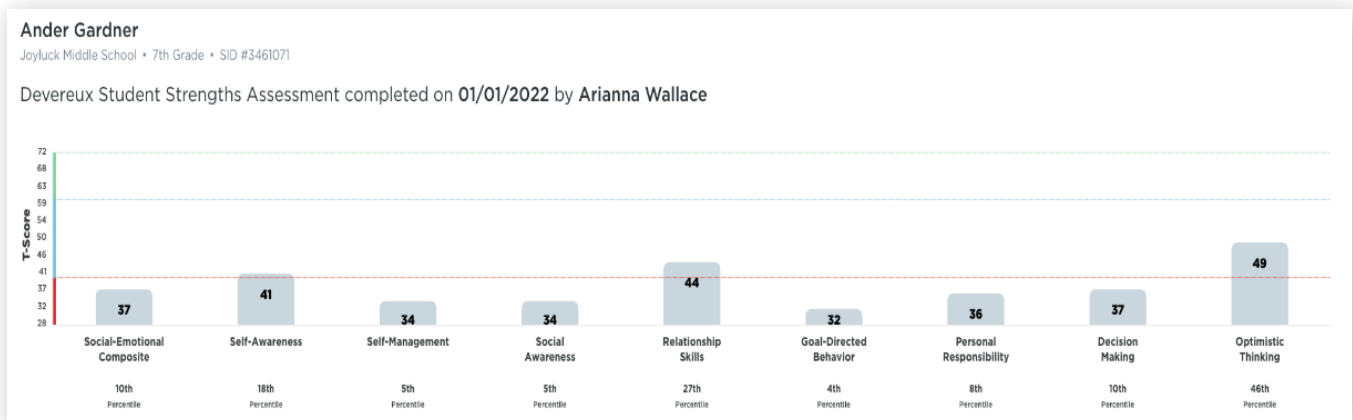
Using the DESSA to Inform Individualized (Tier 3) SEL Programming

The DESSA is a strength-based assessment that can provide both general and special education teachers with valuable information about their students' social and emotional competence. Data from a student's DESSA results can be used to inform present levels of performance, to outline goals and objectives, and to communicate with parents about student strengths.

For each student being served at Tier 3, the data review process is primarily focused on the individual student level but follows the same steps as described for Universal and Targeted supports: 1) accessing the data, 2) reviewing the data, 3) reflecting on the data, 4) acting on the data, and 5) continued progress monitoring. SEL teams should also review data across their Tier 3 program to determine whether individualized services are effectively supporting students to achieve their goals.

1. Access the Data

Once an educator completes DESSA ratings for students receiving special education services, they should access the individual student report in the Aperture System. The sample report below is for a fictitious student named Ander Gardner. The first part of the report shows the student's DESSA composite score (SEC), and then includes their score for each competency.

Ander Gardner
Joyluck Middle School • 7th Grade • SID #3461071

Devereux Student Strengths Assessment completed on 01/01/2022 by Arianna Wallace

	Social-Emotional Composite	Self-Awareness	Self-Management	Social Awareness	Relationship Skills	Goal-Directed Behavior	Personal Responsibility	Decision Making	Optimistic Thinking
T-Score	37	41	34	34	44	32	36	37	49
Percentile	10th	18th	5th	5th	27th	4th	8th	10th	46th

The student report also provides an individual item analysis below this graph. The team or teacher can review the results for each item on the DESSA or can select an item analysis for one competency. In the sample below, the team selected an item analysis for Self-Management. Although Ander's results indicated a need for instruction for most items, he frequently adjusts well when going from one setting to another (see third item). Within each SEC, the item analysis provides feedback on the specific skills that may be strengths or emerging strengths (e.g., in the strength or typical categories), and those that indicate a need for instruction.

| Individual Item Analysis | Self-Management | | |
Competency	Item	Response	Category
Self-Management	wait for their turn?	Frequently	Typical
Self-Management	act comfortable in a new situation?	Occasionally	Typical
Self-Management	adjust well when going from one setting to another?	Frequently	Typical
Self-Management	pay attention?	Rarely	Need
Self-Management	focus on a task despite a problem or distraction?	Never	Need
Self-Management	perform the steps of a task in order?	Rarely	Need
Self-Management	think before they acted?	Rarely	Need
Self-Management	pass up something they wanted, or do something they did not like, to get something better in the future?	Never	Need
Self-Management	accept another choice when their first choice was unavailable?	Occasionally	Need
Self-Management	stay calm when faced with a challenge?	Never	Need

A student's DESSA results should be used to identify areas in which the student displays strengths or typical skills, because these can be leveraged to support the development of other SEC. For example, Ander's DESSA results in Optimistic Thinking showed a *T*-score of 49, which is in the typical range. Ander's optimistic thinking can be leveraged to support engaging in goal-directed behavior. An individual item analysis of each competency provides the team with detailed information that can guide IEP planning.

| Individual Item Analysis | Optimistic Thinking | | |
Competency	Item	Response	Category
Optimistic Thinking	carry themselves with confidence?	Frequently	Typical
Optimistic Thinking	say good things about themselves?	Frequently	Typical
Optimistic Thinking	speak about positive things?	Frequently	Typical
Optimistic Thinking	say good things about the future?	Frequently	Typical
Optimistic Thinking	look forward to classes or activities at school?	Occasionally	Need
Optimistic Thinking	say good things about their classmates?	Occasionally	Need
Optimistic Thinking	express high expectations for themselves?	Occasionally	Need

2. Review the Data

Once the team or teacher has the individual student's results, they can engage in a review process as outlined in Table 5 to get started with individualized SEL programming.

Table 5. *Individualized SEL Programming: Guiding Questions for Using DESSA Results*

Question 1: How can we use DESSA results to get started with individualized (Tier 3) SEL programming?	
Review initial screening data using the following steps as a guide.	**Data Sources**
1. Review each student's DESSA results	My Students Report Individual Student Report
a. What is the student's profile of current skills – note any competencies in which they display a strength – typical – need for instruction	
b. Consider how social emotional competencies in which the student is in the typical or strength range can be leveraged to promote growth in other areas.	
c. Select 1-3 competencies to focus on. It might be helpful to conduct an item analysis for an area of relative strength, as well as for an area of need.	Individual Item Analysis Section of the Individual Student Report
2. Once the team has selected individual items of focus, these can be used to describe present levels of performance.	
3. Set IEP goals based on the selected areas.	Competencies Report
Question 2: Are students who are receiving Individualized SEL supports making progress?	
Review DESSA data for individual students throughout the year using the following steps.	**Data Sources**
1. Determine a progress monitoring schedule using the DESSA – we recommend 3 times per year.	School SEL Implementation Plan
2. Review ongoing progress monitoring data for individual students. Is the student making adequate progress?	My Students Report
a. If yes, celebrate your student's success and continue with the individualized SEL program.	
b. If no, check on program implementation. Are supports delivered with fidelity? With sufficient frequency, duration, and intensity?	Observation; Attendance; Implementation records; Discuss with targeted program provider
3. Review results for all students receiving Individualized supports. What percentage of students are meeting their individualized goals? This will help the team consider whether Tier 3 SEL programming is generally effective.	Impact Report (for students receiving Special Education only)
4. Disaggregate results to determine whether there are differences in the number of students who are meeting their individualized goals.	Impact Report (run by subgroup)

It is also important to **consider other types of data** as part of the reflection process. Information about attendance, academic performance, and conduct can help to put the DESSA results in context and prioritize action steps. The intervention planning form included in the Appendix provides a template for ensuring the team considers multiple sources of evidence/data.

3. Act on the Data

Depending on the results of your data review and reflection, your SEL team may set goals to address various aspects of your Tier 3 program. For example, your team might set a goal that more than 80% of students receiving individualized support meet their individualized goals.

If your team finds that very few students are making progress in the Individualized program, this might suggest that the Tier 3 program is misaligned to student needs, or that it is not well-implemented, or a combination of both. Your team can use the action plan template to create an action plan to collect fidelity data, to review the alignment of program focus to student needs, and to determine whether additional resources to support positive outcomes for your Tier 3 program are needed.

4. Monitor Progress

Progress monitoring at the individualized level lets you know whether the SEL supports provided to the student are leading to growth in their social and emotional competence. The DESSA results can be used to evaluate student progress towards their individualized goals. The Impact Report allows you to compare the progress from one rating to the next in strength, typical, need for instruction categories for students in aggregate. The "student movement" feature provides specific information on how many students from a given category (e.g., need for instruction) moved to a different category (e.g., typical, strength) between ratings.

First, a team can look at the change in students' overall social and emotional competence. The screenshot of this figure shows that no students moved from the need for instruction range. The team should do a deeper look at the data.

Change in Students' Overall Social and Emotional Competence
Displays changes over time in the distribution of descriptive ranges for students
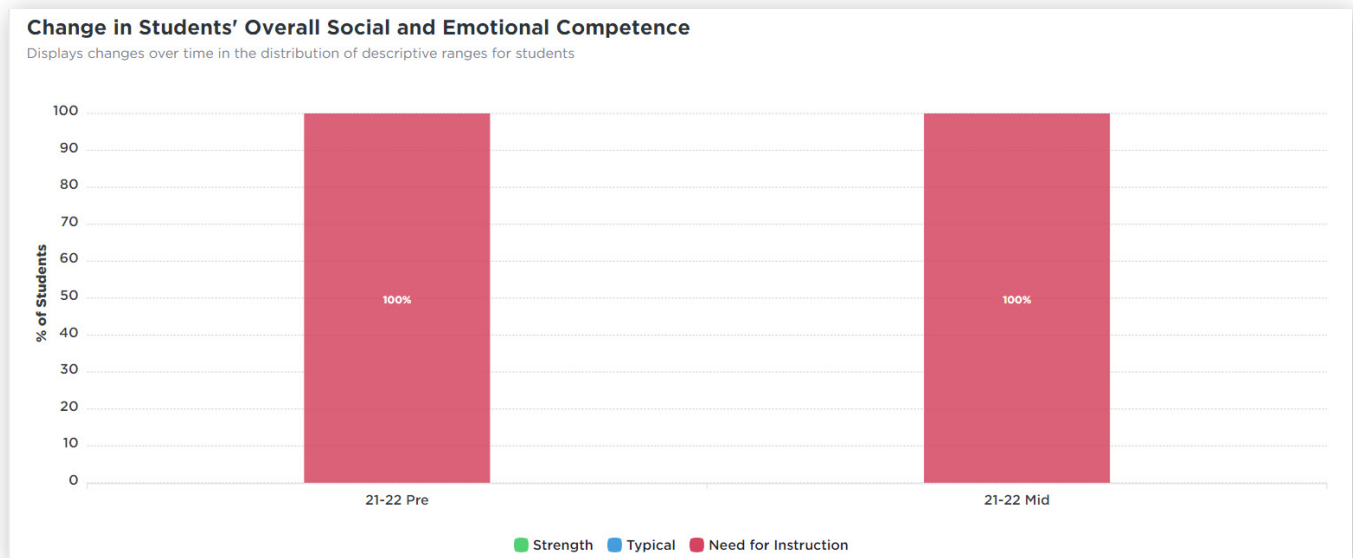
The student movement figure provides more specific information, although in this example, we see that the five students whose DESSA ratings indicated a need for instruction remained in that category in the mid-year rating (e.g., there was no movement to different categories).
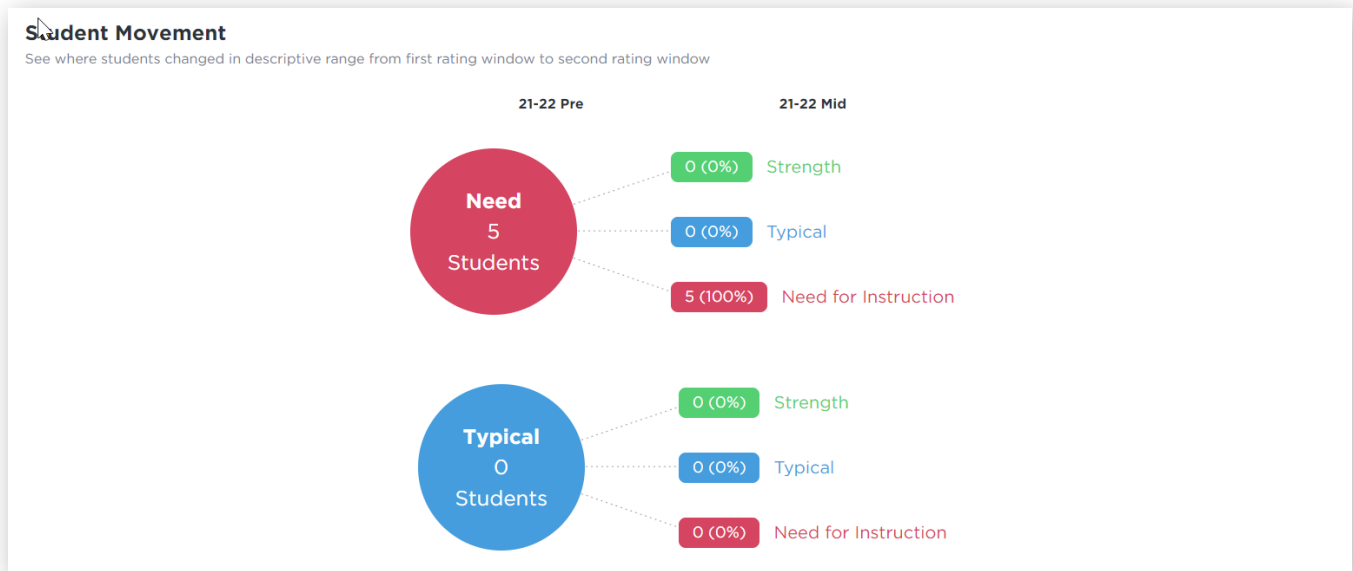
The change in DESSA Social and Emotional Competencies graph provides more detailed information about student progress. In the figure below, we can see that there was a positive change in the percentage of students in the typical range for both Self-Awareness (from 20% to 60%) and Optimistic Thinking (from 20% to 40%), but a decrease in the percentage of students in the typical range for Personal Responsibility and Decision Making (from 20% to 0%).

This more detailed analysis shows that students are making growth in specific competencies even if this is not reflected in the overall SEC scores. Tier 3 teams can use this information to adjust individualized supports as needed. For example, a focus on Self-Management skill development may be helpful for students receiving Tier 3 supports.
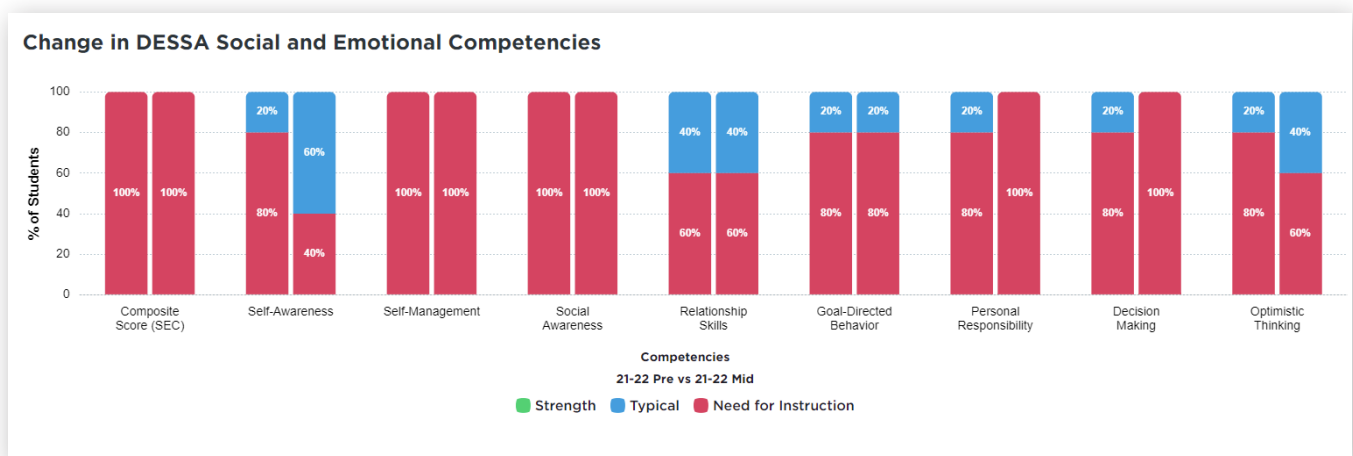
Conclusion

The DESSA assessments are an important part of a data-driven SEL system. This guide describes an implementation process based on best practices in SEL and MTSS. School teams may need to adapt elements of implementation to best fit their particular needs.

As a strengths-based assessment of SEC, it is important to emphasize that the goal across all tiers of support is not just to reduce or prevent challenging behaviors, but to develop the competencies that promote school and life success for students.

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Appendix

My Students Report
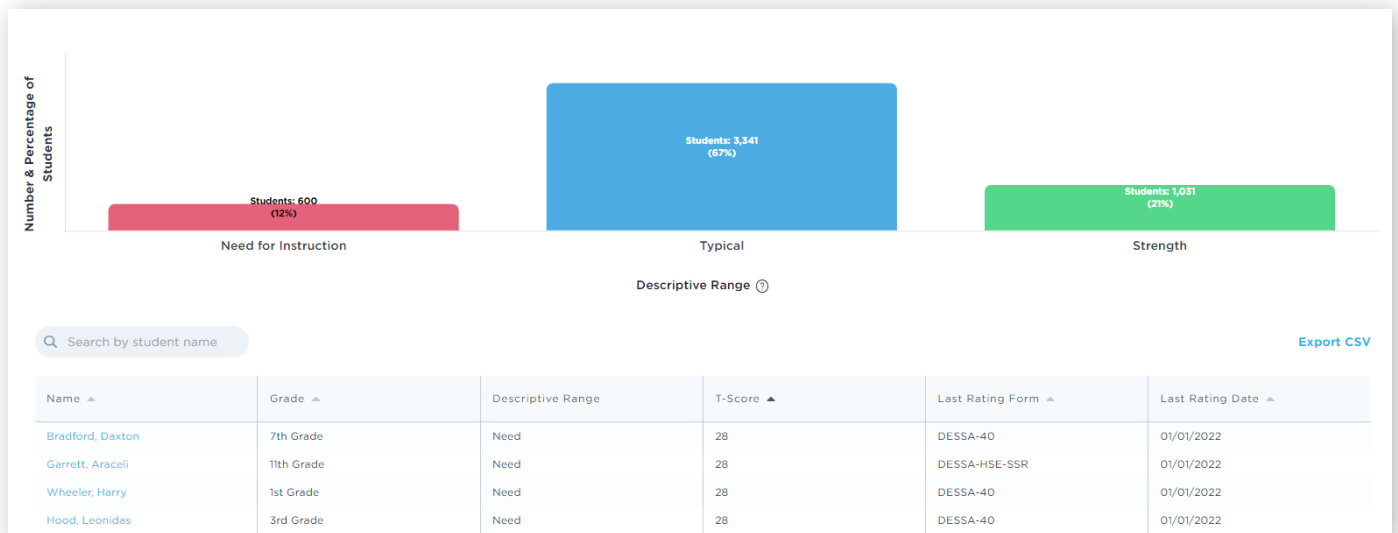
Navigation: **Data & Insights → My Students**

Description: The My Students Report shows the distribution of student assessment scores across the ***Need for Instruction, Typical,*** and ***Strength*** descriptive ranges and helps to identify students in most need for intervention and support.
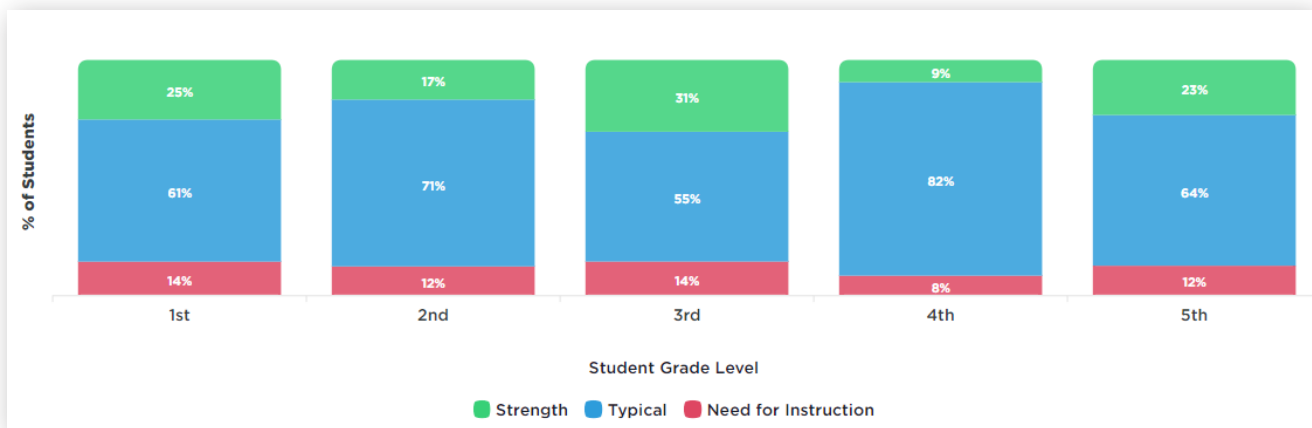
Feel free to use the filters at the top to narrow the visible results shown based on the site, grade, rater, or demographic categories. By default, this report will filter to the current rating window for all sites you have access to.

Notes: If you'd like to export the table of student scores, click on the button on the top right of the table to **Export CSV**.

To drill into a particular student, click on the student's name.

Appendix

Grade Level Report

Navigation: Data & Insights → Grade Level

Description: The Grade Level Report allows school leaders to identify differences in social and emotional competence across grades.

Feel free to use the filters at the top to narrow the visible results shown based on the site, grade, rater, or demographic categories. By default, this report will filter to the current rating window.

Notes: To print this report, click on the More Actions (three dots icon) in the top right of the report and select **Print**.

Appendix

Rating Export

Navigation: Data & Insights ➔ Rating Export

Description: The Rating Export is a comprehensive .csv export of all of the ratings that have been completed. It includes student details, competency level scores, and rating item level detail.

To generate the report, select the Rating Form, a date range, and the site(s) that you would like to export ratings from. Click **Export** to generate and download the file.

Notes: The details exported will be representative of a "snapshot" of the student at the time of the rating. For instance, if you are pulling an export from last year, the student will be displayed with their grade from last year, not their current grade.

Appendix

Impact Report

Navigation: Data & Insights → Impact

Description: The Impact Report compares two rating windows to show any growth of students between the two periods. To generate the Impact Report, start by selecting two Ratings Windows to compare at the top of the report and click Apply.
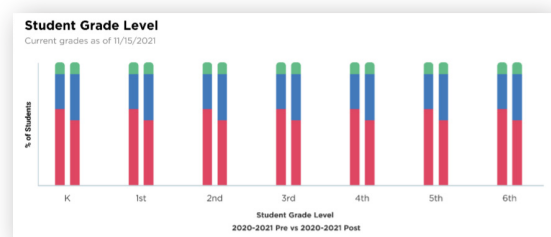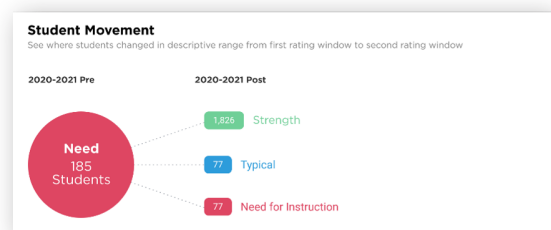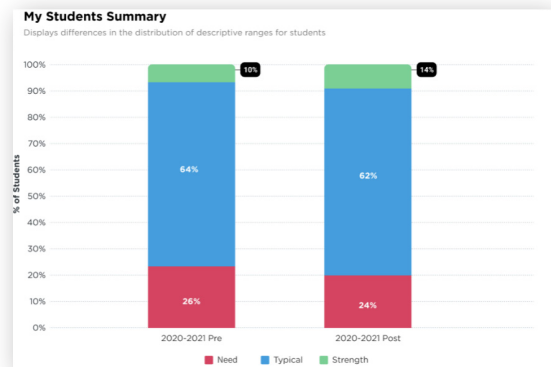
The My Students Summary at the top shows the distribution of students across the three descriptive ranges for each of the rating windows:

The Student Movement charts display how students who started in a particular descriptive range, such as Need for Instruction, moved to another descriptive range category in the second rating window:

The Student Grade Level chart displays the changes in descriptive range, grouped by grade. As a note, the grade is representative of the students current grade as of the date of the report. Each grade band is therefore comparing the same group of students.

The Competencies Chart(s) at the bottom show the changes in the descriptive range, grouped by competency. As a note, only students with competency level scores in both rating windows will be displayed in this chart.
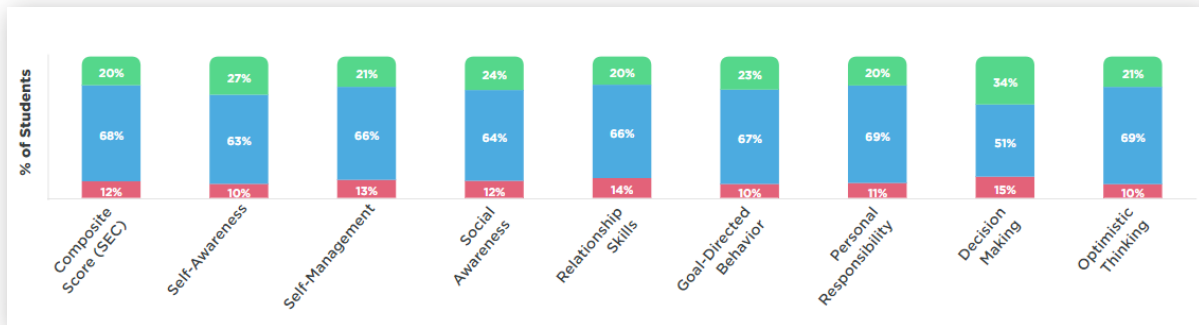
Notes: This report will only show data of students who had ratings in BOTH ratings windows, in order to compare apples to apples.

My Students Summary — Displays differences in the distribution of descriptive ranges for students

Student Movement — See where students changed in descriptive range from first rating window to second rating window

Student Grade Level — Current grades as of 11/15/2021

DESSA Competencies

APERTURE EDUCATION

Appendix

Competencies Report

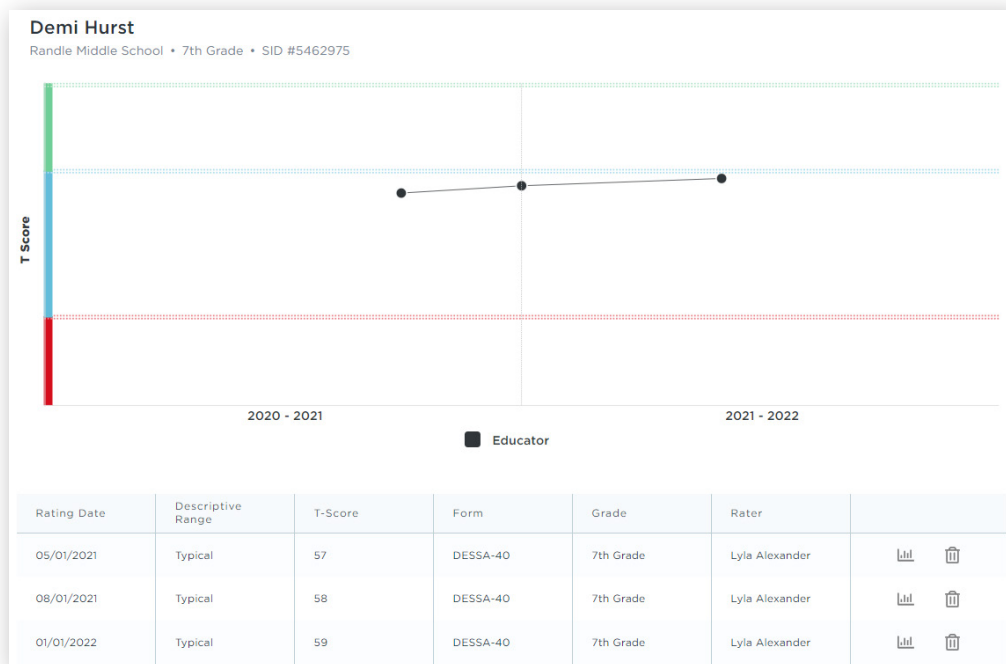**Navigation:** Data & Insights → Competencies

Description: The Competencies Report shows differences within your school(s) across our eight social and emotional competencies. This is a great report to evaluate which universal strategies would be most impactful to implement.

Notes: If you'd like to export the table of competency scores, click on the button on the top right of the table to **Export CSV**.

To drill into a particular student, click on the student's name.

Appendix

Individual Student Report

Demi Hurst
Randle Middle School • 7th Grade • SID #5462975

Rating Date	Descriptive Range	T-Score	Form	Grade	Rater		
05/01/2021	Typical	57	DESSA-40	7th Grade	Lyla Alexander	📊	🗑
08/01/2021	Typical	58	DESSA-40	7th Grade	Lyla Alexander	📊	🗑
01/01/2022	Typical	59	DESSA-40	7th Grade	Lyla Alexander	📊	🗑

Navigation:

1. Searching for a student using the search bar in the top navigation
2. **Data & Insights ➜ My Students / Competencies ➜** clicking on a student

Description: This report displays a student's assessment scores over time. It also has a table of each rating, ordered by recency.

To drill into an Individual Rating Report, click on the Report (graph icon) on the far right of the rating table.

Notes: You have the ability to delete a rating as needed from this report by clicking on the **Delete** (trash can icon) next to the rating in the rating table.

Appendix

Data Action Plan Template

Goal:	Measurable Objectives:
Once you have reflected on your data, it is time to set a goal, create an action plan, and then execute that plan. You should work to set assessment goals and universal programming implementation goals.	• Reflect data • Set goals • Create an action plan • Execute

Strategy/Action	Person Responsible	Measurement	Resources	Timeline

Adapted from The School Portfolio Toolkit (Bernhardt, 2002)

Appendix

Intervention Planning Form

Student Name:		Date:	
Grade:			

Student Data Review: (make notes for areas of strength or challenge)			
Attendance	**Grades/Classwork**	**Standardized Testing/ Universal Screening**	**Discipline**

Additional Background Information to Consider: (i.e. 504, special education, RTI, medical, historical data, anecdotal, family history, etc.)

Full - DESSA Assessment Score Review

Rater Name:		Date of Rating:	

Strengths: (circle all that apply)

Optimistic Thinking	Self-Management	Personal Responsibility	Self-Awareness
Relationship Skills	Decision Making	Goal Directed Behavior	Social-Awareness

Needs: (circle all that apply)

Optimistic Thinking	Self-Management	Personal Responsibility	Self-Awareness
Relationship Skills	Decision Making	Goal Directed Behavior	Social-Awareness

Target behavior(s): Challenging behavior(s) *Be specific about the behavior, define it clearly and list only what you can see.* Limit to 2-3 behaviors	
Replacement Behavior(s): (i.e. behavioral goal) *What is expected of the student in place of what they are currently doing?* *-Be specific, make sure it is in language the student, parent, and others can understand and list specifically what you want to see* *-Limit to only 2-3* *Make sure 1-2 are behaviors that you know the student* **can** *achieve*	

Social Emotional Competence Targeted (circle 1-2)

Optimistic Thinking	Self-Management	Personal Responsibility	Self-Awareness
Relationship Skills	Decision Making	Goal Directed Behavior	Social-Awareness

Method of Teaching Replacement Behavior, strategy utilized, and by Whom: *How will we teach the desired behavior and who will teach it?* *Indicate the person responsible on the line and the strategy utilized below it*	• Direct instruction, by: _____ • Anger management, by: _____ • Role playing, by: _____ • Behavior contract, by: _____ • Decision-making lesson, by: _____ • Other, _____, by: _____	• Social skills training, by: _____ • Providing cues, by: _____ • Modeling, by: _____ • Stress management, by: _____ • Use of mentor(s), by: _____

Method of Measuring Progress: *How will we know if it's working or not?* (circle those that apply)	• Direct observation • Charting/graphing • DESSA assessment • Other:_____	• Daily behavior sheet • Self-monitoring • Grades	• Weekly behavior sheet • Number of discipline referrals
Length of Intervention:	• 4 weeks	• 6 weeks	• other
Positive Consequences for Appropriate Behavior: *What can the student earn for improvement?* (circle those that apply)	• Verbal praise • Earned privileges • Tangible rewards • Other: _____	• Immediate feedback • Earned tokens/points • Free time	• Computer time • Positive call or note home • Positive visit to office
Negative Consequences for Inappropriate Behavior: *What happens if student does not make progress?* (circle those that apply)	• Loss of points/tokens • Phone call home • Send to office • Escort to another area	• Loss of privilege • Work detail • In school suspension • Other:	• Time out • Detention • Out-of-school-suspension

To be filled out during the Intervention Planning meeting/discussion

Student Agrees to:	Parent Agrees to:	Teacher(s) Agree to:	Administration Agree to?	Counselor Agrees to:

Date of Review:

Next Steps:

Additional Notes:

APERTURE EDUCATION

Aperture Education has empowered over 6,500 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. 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. This system enables education leaders to make strategic, data-based decisions about SEL within their organizations. Aperture has supported more than 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.