

# 4-12 Components of SEL & Intellectual Habits and DESSA Crosswalk

*Prepared September 2023*

The DESSA is a strength-based assessment tool that measures students' social and emotional skills. In about 5-8 minutes, the educator form (for kindergarten through 12th grades) can be completed by teachers or out-of-school-time staff and the High School Student Self-Report can be completed by students (in 9th through 12th grades). The DESSA can be used to inform and support the implementation of an SEL program through identifying students' social and emotional strengths and areas of need. It can also be used to guide SEL strategies and interventions at the individual student, small group, classroom, school, or district level, to evaluate the impact of SEL programs, and to support continuous quality improvement efforts to promote optimal SEL outcomes in schools and programs.

This alignment tool shows how the DESSA can be used to assess skills and measure outcomes aligned with the Connecticut Components of Social, Emotional, and Intellectual Habits: Grades 4-12.

## DESSA Scale Key

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

The following definitions for the areas of development of the components of social, emotional, and intellectual habits are sourced directly from the Connecticut State Department of Education [Components of Social, Emotional, and Intellectual Habits: Grades 4-12](#).

- Develop a positive self-concept: the way someone thinks about, evaluates, or perceives oneself; to be aware of oneself; and aware of one's place in the community.
- Develop a positive attitude toward learning: the ability to be grateful and cheerful and maintain a growth mindset; to approach one's circumstances with optimism and enthusiasm.
- Identify and understand emotions of self and others: the ability to recognize and label emotions in oneself and others (emotion knowledge); express one's feelings in contextually appropriate ways (emotion expression).
- Develop positive interpersonal relationships: a developed aptitude enabling a person to carry on effective interactions and relationships with others, such as the ability to communicate thought and feeling, or to assume appropriate social responsibilities.

- Develop executive functioning skills: the mental processes required to focus, plan, and control behavioral responses in service of a goal.
- Develop logic and reasoning: the ability to recognize and use multiple perspectives and approaches (e.g., negotiate the pros and cons of ideas and solutions, analyze options using if-then rationale, and recognize cause-effect relationships) to explore, negotiate, and analyze options.
- Develop modes of symbolic representation: a method of sense-making that entails an expression of meaning using options such as visual analogy, sketch, monologue, collage, cartoon, among others, to express meaning.

Note. Grayed-out areas indicate overlap with competencies measured by the DESSA. SA = Self-Awareness, SM = Self-Management, SO = Social Awareness, RS = Relationship Skills, GB = Goal-Directed Behavior, PR = Personal Responsibility, DM = Decision Making, OT = Optimistic Thinking

Late Elementary										
Area of Development	Learning Progression	Indicators	SA	SM	SO	RS	GB	PR	DM	OT
<b>Develop executive functioning skills</b>	Working memory and metacognition	Attend to relevant information and goal-directed tasks while resisting distractions and shifting tasks when necessary								
		Break down tasks into small, manageable action steps								
		Use learned strategies to monitor progress on planned action steps								
		Use cognitive organizers and multisensory strategies that engage more than one sense at a time to organize one's thinking								
		Demonstrate the ability to cognitively maintain and manipulate information over a short period of time								
		With adult guidance, break a project down into smaller pieces and develop a reasonable timeline for completing each piece								
	Cognitive flexibility	Demonstrate the ability to adjust one's thinking in response to changes in one's environment, new information or to changes in one's goal(s)								
		Monitor progress on achieving a goal and make adjustments and amendments to plans and decisions								
	Self-regulation of emotions and reactions	Identify and articulate feelings when faced with a problem or challenge and work through the issue with adult support								
		Identify feelings and apply strategies to regulate emotions and manage behaviors								
	Managing attention and behavior	With adult guidance, work towards goals by using organizational skills and strategies to focus attention								
		Sustain attention and work to manage the behaviors that interfere with time on task								

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Late Elementary (continued)

Area of Development	Learning Progression	Indicators	SA	SM	SO	RS	GB	PR	DM	OT	
<b>Develop a positive self-concept</b>	Self-awareness	Acknowledges challenges and behaviors and is able to identify and use voice to advocate for self and others									
		Understand that emotions may vary based on the situation, including people and places in school and the community while identifying healthy ways to advocate for self									
		Recognize how one's interactions with a trusted adult or peer can provide social or emotional support or assistance for self									
		Understand one's personal values, attitudes, and beliefs									
	Sense of self as competent and capable	Identify a range of tasks and address challenges while expressing a positive attitude toward self									
		Acknowledges and welcomes constructive feedback from others that addresses challenges and builds resilience, and identifies strengths and areas for growth									
		Courageously explore new knowledge independently and interdependently	Recognize the importance of working independently and interdependently								
		Identify skill sets and ways to advocate for academic, personal and emotional support respectfully to work towards resiliency									
	<b>Develop logic and reasoning</b>	Critical and analytical thinking	Demonstrate a personal understanding of problems by asking questions to better understand material and information								
		Applying known information to new experiences	Apply new strategies based on lessons learned from feedback								
Reasoning and problem solving		Consider multiple strategies and use different methods to check answers to solve problems									
		Generate possible solutions or responses to a problem or needed decision recognizing that there may be more than one perspective									
		Demonstrate the ability to respect the rights of self and others when resolving problems									

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Late Elementary (continued)

Area of Development	Learning Progression	Indicators	SA	SM	SO	RS	GB	PR	DM	OT
<b>Develop modes of symbolic representation</b>	Conceptual models of representation	Use drawings, diagrams, analogies, metaphors, and objects to access one's own mental models to understand abstract concepts								
		Create and use visual models (e.g., decision tree or t-chart and informative/explanatory texts) when working through the problem-solving or decision-making process								
	Applying conceptual models to real-life situations	Participate in class discussions and role-play, about real-world scenarios that occur in the school and classrooms to examine different scenarios								
<b>Develop a positive attitude toward learning</b>	Sense of self as a learner	Describe how a trusted adult can provide academic support for self and others								
		Seek appropriate support from a trusted adult when help is needed academically								
		Recognize that one's unique abilities and strengths are key factors in success								
		Explore how one's own cultural experiences influence learning and understanding								
	Curiosity and initiative	Seek out new opportunities to expand personal knowledge and experiences								
		Explore new things with openness, and identify strategies and make use of resources to support learning								
	Cooperation during learning experiences	Understand and perform different roles in cooperative groups (e.g., leader, recorder, timekeeper, reporter)								
		Demonstrate cooperation and teamwork to promote group effectiveness								
		Consider various perspectives and sources of information when participating in group decision-making								
		Identify and demonstrate personal behaviors (e.g., listening, consensus seeking, empathy, compassion, group leadership, knowing how to support group efforts) to promote communication and social engagement								
Participate in cross-cultural activities and understand that individual and group differences may complement each other										

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Middle School										
Area of Development	Learning Progression	Indicators	SA	SM	SO	RS	GB	PR	DM	OT
<b>Develop executive functioning skills</b>	Working memory and metacognition	Evaluate steps taken to accomplish a task and identify areas for growth to achieve further success								
		Use reflective thinking practices (i.e., think about one's own learning, think more deeply, gain insight into thoughts and feelings about ideas)								
		Demonstrate a deep and personal understanding of material and information by asking questions								
		Reframe a current challenge or setback by reflecting on successes, and monitor how responsible decision-making impacts progress								
		With adult support, develop specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-oriented (SMART) goals for long-term action planning								
	Cognitive flexibility	Reflect on unanticipated outcomes and develop new strategies and adaptive approaches that lead toward meeting goals								
		Begin to practice ways to be flexible and adaptable as one moves from familiar to unfamiliar tasks								
		Look at issues from multiple perspectives to encourage creative ways of thinking about a situation								
	Self-regulation of emotions and reactions	Apply effective strategies to cope with disappointment, setbacks and failure, and persist toward goals								
		Apply effective self-monitoring strategies to reframe thoughts and behaviors and regulate emotions								
	Managing attention and behavior	Identify and use organizational skills and strategies independently and with peers, to focus attention to complete multistep tasks								
		Demonstrate the capacity to use effective strategies to maintain concentration on a task and ignore unnecessary and outside distractions								

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**Middle School** *(continued)*

Area of Development	Learning Progression	Indicators	SA	SM	SO	RS	GB	PR	DM	OT	
<b>Develop a positive self-concept</b>	Self-awareness	Understand, express, explain, and reflect on challenges faced and be aware that behaviors can influence decisions, and impact learning (while continuing to identify and use voice to advocate for self and others)									
		Understand that all emotions are valid, even if others feel differently in that environment									
		Know when to utilize a trusted adult or peer when help is needed, socially or emotionally									
		Understand the values that are part of one's own culture and the benefits these values bring.									
	Sense of self as competent and capable	Manage tasks and challenges, while reframing negative thoughts and engaging in positive self-talk									
		Accepts constructive feedback, reflects and understands personal choices and sense of agency to develop and implement a plan of action that addresses challenges despite difficulties, mistakes, delays, or failure with persistence and resilience while understanding strengths and areas for growth									
		Demonstrate confidence to work independently and interdependently and explore new learning									
	Courageously explore new knowledge independently and interdependently	Demonstrate self-advocacy skills with self-reflection academically, personally, and behaviorally and be able to adapt in the face of adversity									
	<b>Develop logic and reasoning</b>	Critical and analytical thinking	Understand how a hypothesis helps in the critical thinking process and begin to develop an informed hypothesis for problems in the learning environment								
		Applying known information to new experiences	Integrate prior experience and knowledge of outcomes to inform decisions								
Reasoning and problem solving		Identify and ask systematic questions that clarify various points of view and lead to an informed solution									
		Demonstrate critical thinking skills when solving problems or making decisions, recognizing there may be more than one perspective or solution									
		Demonstrate the ability to respect the rights of self and others when resolving problems									

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**Middle School** *(continued)*

Area of Development	Learning Progression	Indicators	SA	SM	SO	RS	GB	PR	DM	OT
<b>Develop modes of symbolic representation</b>		Develop, use, and make necessary changes to one's mental models to examine and understand increasingly complex information and abstract concepts (i.e., big ideas, important understandings)	■				■		■	
	Conceptual models of representation	Use mapping activities (e.g., vocabulary maps, definition maps, semantic maps) to demonstrate a strong understanding of a concept or idea (e.g., how other people might feel about an experience or situation)	■		■				■	
		Examine topics and choose a method (e.g., create visual models, informative/explanatory texts) to convey ideas						■	■	
		Examine topics and develop conceptual models (e.g., visual models, informative/explanatory texts) to convey ideas and explain the relationships among ideas						■	■	
	Applying conceptual models to real-life situations	Reflect and discuss scenarios (real-world examples/current events), including engaging in role-play, and how behavior impacted another person(s) to expand one's thinking; engage in reflection and discussions to help broaden perspectives, understand different perspectives, see multiple options, or increase empathy	■		■	■				■

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**Middle School** *(continued)*

Area of Development	Learning Progression	Indicators	SA	SM	SO	RS	GB	PR	DM	OT
<b>Develop a positive attitude toward learning</b>	Sense of self as a learner	Utilize support from trusted adults, as well as resources and agencies that provide academic support								
		Identify the cause of a challenge or setback; develop a plan of action								
		Identify something one would like to be able to do better and take appropriate action steps to improve or access resources to support growth								
		Understand how one's personal strengths connect to academic learning								
		Participate in and contribute to cross-cultural activities, and reflect on the experiences and how those experiences contribute to one's personal learning and growth								
	Curiosity and initiative	Explore opportunities to develop personal strengths and assets to support academic achievement								
		Embrace productive struggle as an opportunity for personal growth								
	Cooperation during learning experiences	Recognize one's own contributions, and demonstrate support for others' contributions to a group/team effort								
		Participate with team/group members to problem-solve and contribute to group outcomes								
		Demonstrate the ability to actively listen, understand, and consider multiple perspectives to increase cooperation and build relationships								
		Become increasingly aware of others' cultural norms, perspectives, and ways of communicating, and demonstrate respectful behavior and consideration of others								
		Participate in cross-cultural activities and demonstrate respect for individuals from different social and cultural groups								

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**Middle School** *(continued)*

Area of Development	Learning Progression	Indicators	SA	SM	SO	RS	GB	PR	DM	OT
<b>Develop positive interpersonal skills</b>	Social awareness and interpersonal skills	Recognize others' thoughts, feelings, and reactions in various social situations while recognizing verbal and nonverbal, social cues that indicate how others may react based on perceptions; build on relationship skills to confirm cues by observation, inquiry, and questioning								
	Responsible decision-making and social problem-solving	Demonstrate the ability and ask for assistance from an adult to seek, identify, and evaluate relevant information and factors for assisting in decision-making and consider the impact of those decisions on others								
		Recognize how social norms may influence decisions, and be able to demonstrate analytical skills to problem-solve and handle peer pressure in a positive way								
	Conflict resolution	Identify resources and supports to help respond appropriately using positive conflict resolution skills independently or with help								
		Demonstrate active listening skills, respond constructively to defuse, de-escalate, and negotiate solutions to resolve conflict								
	<b>Identify and understand emotions of self and others</b>	Emotional awareness	Practice active and reflective listening skills to express emotions in a constructive manner (coping skills) and use safe spaces and appropriate times to process emotions for self and others, recognize triggers, and ask for help							
Apply self-monitoring strategies to reframe behaviors, emotions, and thoughts and adjust depending on the situation and environment										
Empathy		Demonstrate empathy through the understanding of others' emotions and feelings and recognition of others' distress and perspective								
		Recognize and select potential ways to respond that center on empathic concerns (e.g., reflecting, asking for help, giving verbal reassurance) when viewpoints or perceptions differ across school, community, both in-person and virtually								
		Demonstrate connectedness and empathy by understanding the importance of contributions from others								

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On the DESSA High School Student Self-Report, the competencies of Self-Awareness and Optimistic Thinking are combined into one competency, Self-Awareness/Optimistic Thinking.

High School										
Area of Development	Learning Progression	Indicators	SA	SM	SO	RS	GB	PR	DM	OT
<b>Develop executive functioning skills</b>	Working memory and metacognition	Modify behavioral responses in service of attaining a longer-term goal								
		Apply focused attention practices to help regulate one's attention and focus								
		Search for strategies to overcome barriers and mistakes								
		Work through challenges, and value effort as a learning experience								
		Develop specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-oriented (SMART) goals for long-term action planning								
	Cognitive flexibility	Identify the pros and cons of possible solutions and implement solutions, generate alternative solutions, and evaluate potential consequences for a range of academic and social situations								
	Self-regulation of emotions and reactions	Apply effective strategies to express emotions when challenged and continue to persist and maintain motivation								
		Use effective regulatory strategies when upset or experiencing setbacks, and apply self-monitoring strategies to reframe and process thoughts and behaviors								
	Managing attention and behavior	Use organizational skills and strategies to focus attention by independently applying effective, goal-directed behaviors								
		Demonstrate the ability to shift focus between tasks and maintain concentration on one's goal for a single priority, or multiple priorities.								

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**High School** *(continued)*

Area of Development	Learning Progression	Indicators	SA	SM	SO	RS	GB	PR	DM	OT	
<b>Develop a positive self-concept</b>	Self-awareness	Identify the skills and assets needed for adulthood and be able to examine strengths and growth opportunities necessary for social-emotional, academic learning, and employability skills									
		Understand the ways emotions impact social, family, and community environments while developing and maintaining a coherent sense of self									
		Apply support from trusted adults, peers, and other resources that provide social, emotional, or health-related support									
		Identify how personal values, attitudes, and beliefs affect interactions with others; understand and evaluate problems in the community, and identify how one's actions lead to success or challenges									
	Sense of self as competent and capable	Set short-term, post-secondary and life goals with confidence in the ability to be successful while positively addressing challenges									
		Reflect on feedback, actions and address personal challenges, and build on individual strengths over time and with persistence and resiliency while enhancing strengths and areas for growth									
	Courageously explore new knowledge independently and interdependently	Demonstrate self-directed learning and the importance of taking responsibility for independent and interdependent thinking and learning									
		Demonstrate self-advocacy in context-specific situations and be able to maneuver through difficult situations and resolve issues									

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**High School** *(continued)*

Area of Development	Learning Progression	Indicators	SA	SM	SO	RS	GB	PR	DM	OT
<b>Develop logic and reasoning</b>	Critical and analytical thinking	Engage in constructive discussion or intellectual argument by supporting one's opinion/hypothesis giving and receiving constructive feedback								
	Applying known information to new experiences	Evaluate and revise prior understandings through new experiences; seek connections to inform future decisions								
	Reasoning and problem solving	Identify problems, analyze situations, decide on solutions, and reflect upon and evaluate the process								
		Explain one's thinking when solving problems and making decisions and respond effectively to others' thinking								
		Demonstrate the ability to respect the rights of self and others when resolving problems								
<b>Develop modes of symbolic representation</b>	Conceptual models of representation	Develop, use, and make necessary changes to one's mental models to examine and understand increasingly complex information and abstract concepts (i.e., big ideas, important understandings)								
		Use conceptual models to look at issues from multiple perspectives to stretch one's thinking and encourage creative ways of thinking about a situation								
		Use conceptual models to guide the development and application of creative strategies and novel approaches when faced with problems or learning tasks								
	Applying conceptual models to real-life situations	Role-play scenarios to help add an experiential element of perspective-taking to decision-making; reflect and discuss the impact of a choice								

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**High School** *(continued)*

Area of Development	Learning Progression	Indicators	SA	SM	SO	RS	GB	PR	DM	OT
<b>Develop a positive attitude toward learning</b>	Sense of self as a learner	Identify key mentors available to support life goals, and cultivate relationships with those individuals								
		Demonstrate confidence in the ability to independently address a challenge while expressing positive attitudes towards self								
		Recognize one's strengths and growth areas in learning and processing information								
		Know how one organizes and processes information and uses internalized learning strategies in order to learn successfully								
		Develop and demonstrate personal, cultural, and linguistic assets that contribute to achieving academic goals								
	Curiosity and initiative	Demonstrate receptiveness to new and unfamiliar ideas and experiences to enhance personal strengths and growth to support learning								
		Generate unconventional ways to do or think about things by exploring and learning from unsuccessful attempts and insight								
	Cooperation during learning experiences	Learn to maintain an objective, non-judgmental tone during disagreements								
		Use positive problem-solving skills to balance personal and group needs and foster respectful group interactions								
		Evaluate one's contribution in groups as a member and leader								
		Plan, implement, and evaluate one's participation in a group project								
		Engage in processes of peer co-regulation (i.e., students supporting, coaching, and modeling for each other, the ability to modulate feelings, thoughts, and behaviors) to create positive group dynamics for optimal learning opportunities								
		Demonstrate an ability to co-exist in civility in the face of differing perspectives								
	Participate in cross-cultural activities, identify unique contributions and perspectives of various groups and how the experience may influence personal perspective									

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**High School** *(continued)*

Area of Development	Learning Progression	Indicators	SA	SM	SO	RS	GB	PR	DM	OT
<b>Develop positive interpersonal skills</b>	Social awareness and interpersonal skills	Respond, inquire for deeper understanding, and reflect on others' verbal, nonverbal, and social cues to assess the meaning, intention, and predictions of behavior; use this information to react in ways that support healthy relationships and protect personal boundaries								
	Responsible decision-making and social problem-solving	Demonstrate critical thinking skills to make informed decisions independently or with the help of a trusted adult, generate various alternatives, and promote the best solutions								
		Demonstrate adaptability, flexibility, and resilience when setbacks, unforeseen events, and/or obstacles arise; use a problem-solving approach to manage the situation and peer pressure by accepting the outcome if it is disappointing								
	Conflict resolution	Demonstrate the ability to seek advice from a trusted peer or adult to discuss and analyze a problem and take the initiative to resolve the conflict								
		Apply conflict resolution skills to defuse, de-escalate, and resolve conflicts, acknowledge differences of opinion and push on to find common ground independently or with help								

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**High School** *(continued)*

Area of Development	Learning Progression	Indicators	SA	SM	SO	RS	GB	PR	DM	OT
<b>Identify and understand emotions of self and others</b>	Emotional awareness	Demonstrate ways to predict situations that can cause triggers or strong emotions and to use developed skillsets to reflect and adjust communication style with others and constructively respond to feedback about improving communication; independently, and with others, be able to manage thoughts, feelings, and emotions								
		Employ self-management and monitoring strategies to regulate complex/simultaneous thoughts, feelings, emotions, and behaviors that impact responses related to a situation or environment (e.g., being nervous and excited at the same time)								
		Identify and demonstrate empathy through compassion for self and others and contemporary issues.								
	Empathy	Use active listening and interpersonal skills to elicit and understand the feelings and opinions of others across all settings when viewpoints or perceptions differ (e.g., asking probing questions, paraphrasing and reflecting, nodding, and leaning forward)								
		Understand the value of diversity and demonstrate empathy and personal reflection for others								



Aperture Education empowers over 8,000 unique schools, over 156,000 educators and more than 2 million students across North America to measure, strengthen, and support social and emotional competence. The powerful data districts receive enables education leaders to take strategic action about SEL within their organizations. The Aperture System includes the DESSA suite of strength-based assessments, which is lauded by researchers for its high standards of reliability and validity. Educators also appreciate its ability to easily and quickly identify each student's personal social and emotional strengths and areas of needed support. Aperture partners with industry curriculum leaders to deliver research-based, CASEL™-informed intervention strategies to bolster specific areas of needed growth. With robust reporting in one easy-to-use system, Aperture is favored in districts nationwide. To learn more, visit [www.ApertureEd.com](http://www.ApertureEd.com).