The Aperture Education Guide to Data-Driven SEL: Middle School Edition

A Multi-Tiered Systems of Support Approach to Build Students' Social Emotional Learning: School Level

APERTURE EDUCATION

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Introduction

This guide was developed for middle 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 (SEC) of all students.

Setting the Stage for Data-Driven SEL

This guide is targeted for middle 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.

✔ The DESSA assessments have been discussed with stakeholders.

✔ All users have been trained on the DESSA assessments, ratings, and reports.

If you are not yet at this point, the resources listed below can 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 DESSA assessments, Foundational Practices, and Strategies can be used as part of an effective, data-driven, school-wide SEL program. The DESSA assessments include the following three measures:

1. **A Screener**. The DESSA-mini 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 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.

2. **An Assessment**. The DESSA is an assessment for students in grades K-8 that provides a score for each of eight social and emotional competencies (see Figure 1) and one Social-Emotional Composite (SEC) score per student. DESSA data can help educators plan how to strengthen, adjust, or add universal and tiered supports in specific areas. The results can also be aggregated and viewed at different levels.

3. **A Student Self-Report**. The DESSA-MSE SSR is a nationally standardized norm-referenced, strength-based behavior rating scale measuring the social and emotional competence of middle school-age students (grades 6-8). The SSR enables middle school youth to report on their own social and emotional strengths, adding an important perspective to the assessment and promotion of students' social and emotional competence.

All DESSA measures report results using a *T*-score. *T*-scores are reported on a scale where 50 is the mean, and the standard deviation is 10. As strength-based measures, higher *T*-scores mean a higher level of social and emotional competence. *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.
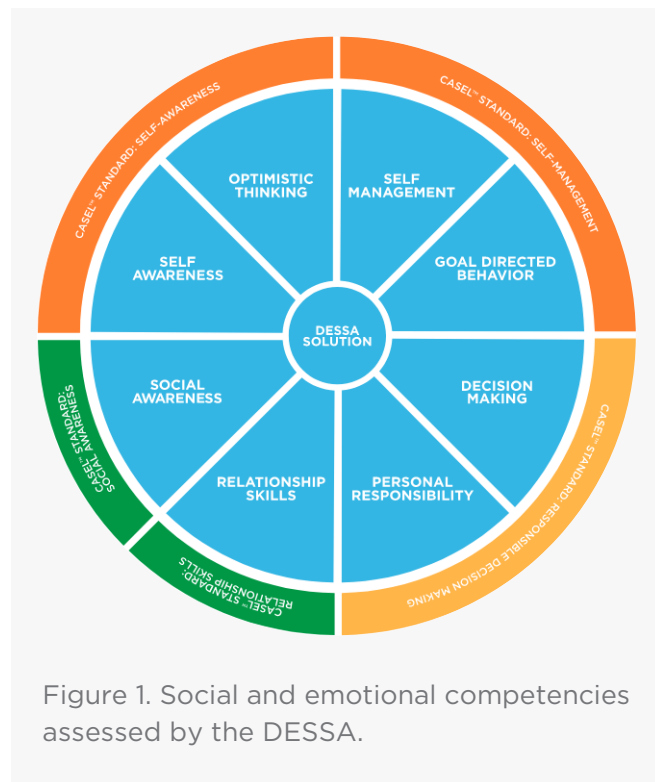

Figure 1. Social and emotional competencies assessed by the DESSA.

Within the Aperture System, teachers can access a set of practices and strategies to implement in their classrooms. There are **Foundational Practices**, which include a set of classroom routines and best practices that establish a positive learning environment. The Aperture System also includes **SEL Strategies** that provide actionable ways for educators to help their students improve social and emotional skills. Each strategy targets one or more of the social and emotional competencies assessed by the DESSA. Schools that have purchased the strategies and intervention package also have access to additional **SEL Strategies** and **Tier 2 Programs**.

Students using the **SSR** can create goals and complete challenges designed to promote stronger social and emotional competence. The SSR system is student directed, allowing them to leverage their strengths to build their skills, or to select areas in which they have a growth opportunity.

The components of the **Aperture System** are designed for use 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.
- **Listen**. All students can complete the SSR to encourage student voice and engagement in SEL efforts.
- **Grow**. Use the data and reports to review, select, and incorporate Foundational Practices and SEL 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.

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Implementing the DESSA Assessments

Middle school implementation teams should consider a multi-year rollout of the DESSA assessments. A recommended sequence includes:

1. **Year 1:** Students complete the SSR at least twice and, if possible, three times during the school year (Fall, Winter, Spring). Teachers can use SSR results to inform what strategies might best support their students. For example, if SSR results indicate that several students need more support with self-management, a teacher can integrate the growth strategies that promote stronger self-management skills.

2. **Year 2:** Continue with the SSR implementation. Have teachers complete the DESSA-mini for all students at least twice (beginning and end of year), or if possible, three times during the school year. For students whose DESSA-mini results indicate a need for instruction, teachers complete the DESSA to get more information about the students' specific needs.

3. **Year 3:** Continue with SSR, DESSA-mini, and DESSA implementation. Include opportunities during data review to compare results between teacher and student forms.

The remainder of this guide is organized into three sections. Section One describes how to implement the SSR and use the data to inform SEL programming. Section Two describes how the DESSA-mini and the DESSA can be used within an MTSS framework. Section Three is for schools that choose to implement both the SSR and the DESSA and describes how to use the data from students and teachers to inform SEL programs.

Section One: Implementing the SSR

To implement the SSR effectively, students need to be prepared to complete their ratings and and teachers, SEL coaches, and building leaders need a plan to review and respond to the data.

The checklist below is designed for middle 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. Students will need some training on the importance of SEL and self-reflection. For planning purposes, the SSR ratings take approximately 10 minutes to complete per student.

SSR Implementation Checklist for SEL Team Leaders

☐ 1. Provide training for students on the importance of social and emotional skills to school and post school success. Students need to understand why it is important for them to complete the SSR.

☐ 2. Discuss how the SSR will provide students with immediate feedback on their social and emotional skills that can be used to create a personalized plan to improve them.

☐ 3. Ensure that students have access to their login information in the Aperture System.

☐ 4. Schedule time for students to complete their self-report ratings. You may want to schedule time at the beginning, middle, and end of school year. Ensure they can complete their ratings in a quiet room free from distractions.

☐ 5. Schedule time for teachers, SEL coaches, and school leaders to review SSR results.

☐ 6. Provide time for students to engage in the learning challenges in the Aperture System.

Student Voice and Choice

As soon as students complete the SSR, they can view their results (see Figure 1). Students can then set goals and engage in a set of activities designed to promote and build their social and emotional skills (see Figure 2). The goal of this system is to empower student voice and to give them agency to engage in self-directed social and emotional learning.
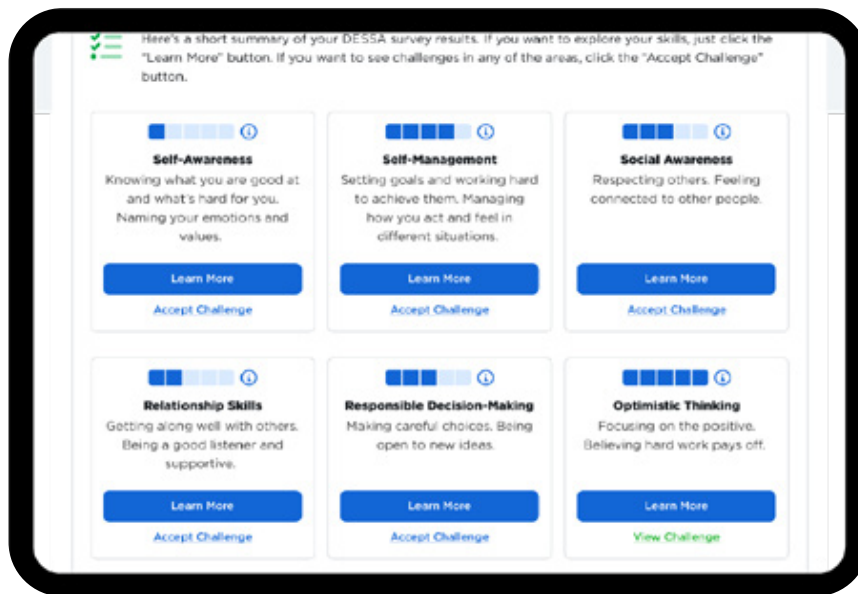

Figure 1. Sample Student SSR Results
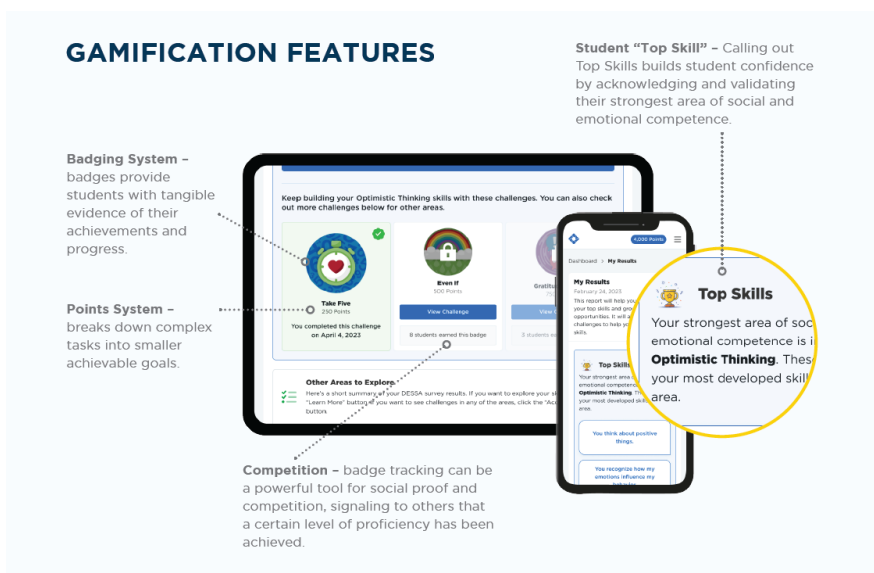
Figure 2. Sample Challenges and Features

Analyzing Data from the SSR

Although the main purpose of the SSR is to empower students to engage in self-directed social and emotional learning, the results of the SSR can and should be reviewed to inform school and class level SEL implementation.

After each rating period, educators should engage in a data-review process, illustrated in Figure 3, 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 students complete the SSR, the results will be available to them immediately, and the results can be reviewed in a variety of ways by educators and school leaders. 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 in their classrooms or programs. Higher levels of aggregated results (e.g., grade or school) are typically available to educational administrators.

Figure 3. Recommended data review process

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. Middle 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*

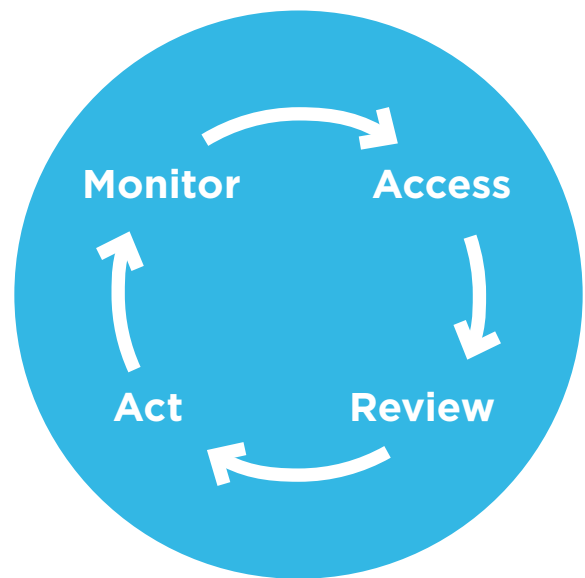| Review initial screening data using the following steps as a guide.	Data Sources
1. Review DESSA-SSR results at the school level – check the percentage of students in strength, typical, need* for instruction categories. Expected distribution is 16 – 68 - 16	My Students Report
a. By grade/class - are 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; the SSR results should be considered along with other data and information about the student – for example, attendance, achievement, engagement, and behavior.	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 SSR norms (16 – 68 – 16); School continuous improvement plan
3. If the results are not consistent with the 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 to support their SEL implementation, 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 SEC *T*-scores (35 and below) first and create support plans as needed, then move on to students with SEC *T*-scores in the 36 to 40 range.	Rating export of SSR data sorted by SEC *T*-score
d. Create a plan or goal to address any areas of growth you have discovered.	

*Refer to the Site Leader Reports Guide in the Support Portal for instructions on how to pull the reports.

*If your results indicate significantly more students demonstrating a need, you may choose to prioritize support to students with very low SEC *T*-scores (35 and below) first, then move on to students with SEC *T*-scores in the 36 to 40 range. If not already in place, you may also consider prioritizing an expanded implementation of universal SEL efforts.

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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.	My Students Report
2. By student population - are there differences in results based on racial/ethnic, gender, student service (e.g., EL, SPED) groups?	
3. Do disaggregated results suggest a need for reflection, discussion, or possibly professional development?	Grade Level Report 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?	

*Refer to the Site Leader Reports Guide in the Support Portal for instructions on how to pull the reports.

Reflect on the Data

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 SSR results 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 during the next rating 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-SSR results is essential. SEL teams should set universal programming implementation goals and goals for improving student outcomes as measured by the DESSA-SSR. For example, an SEL team may choose to focus SEL programming on a specific competency such as Self-Management if aggregated results suggest that it is an area of need for a high percentage of students.

4. Monitor Progress

The SSR can be administered up to three times during the year, in the fall, winter, and spring. SSR results can be reviewed at the school, grade, class, and student levels to see how results 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.

The Impact Report allows you to compare the progress of students from one rating to the next in the strength, typical, and need for instruction categories (see Figure 4). 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 (see Figure 5).

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 (see Figure 6).

Change in Students' Overall Social and Emotional Competence
Displays changes over time in the distribution of descriptive ranges for students

21-22 Post: 20%, 66%, 14%
22-23 Pre: 24%, 64%, 12%
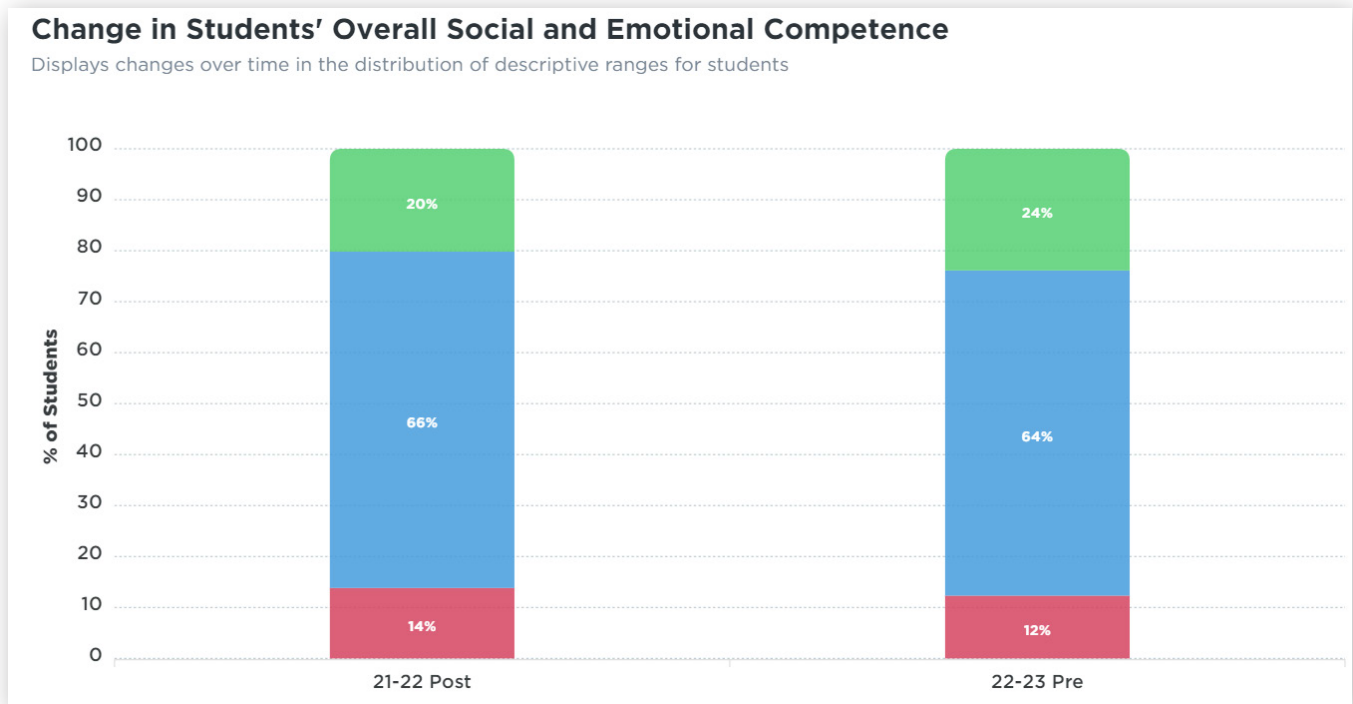
Figure 4. Sample Impact Report for SSR Data
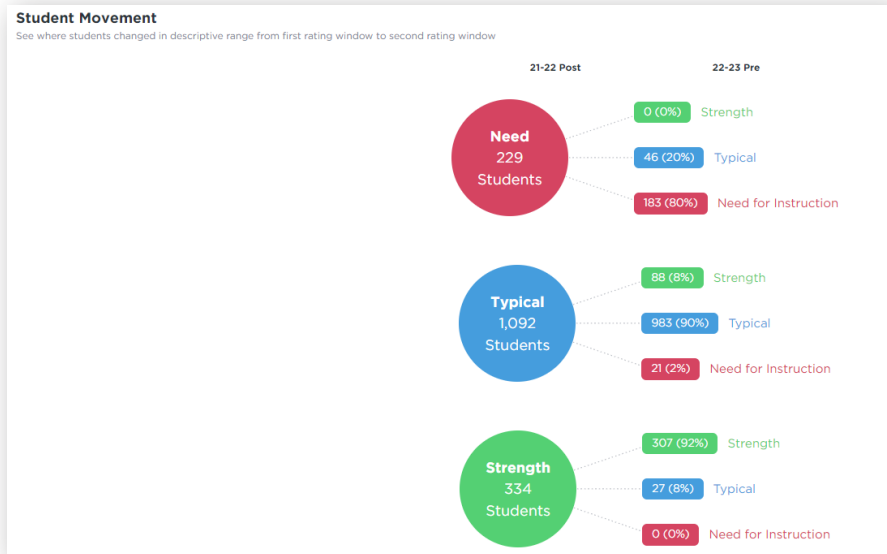
Figure 5. Sample Student Movement Report for SSR Data
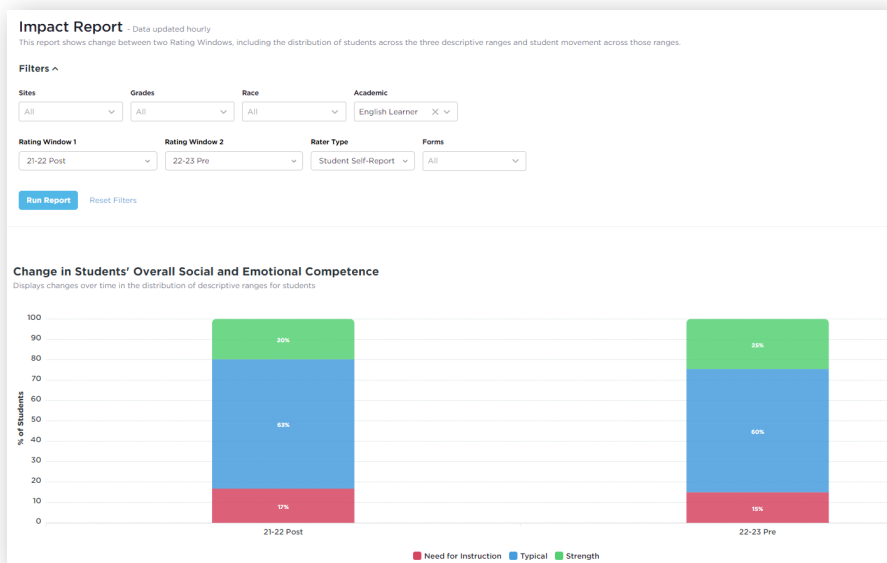
Figure 6. Sample Student Movement Report for SSR Data among English Learners

Things to Consider when Reviewing Progress Monitoring Data

When looking for progress, **be patient**. Although the goal of SEL programming is to build students' social and emotional competence, growth takes focused, schoolwide effort — especially for older students. Also, some students could **decline**. For example, students who experience hardship or traumatic life events between assessments may show lower social and emotional competence at follow-up. Data provided through the SSR 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 social and emotional competence over the school year but decline over the summer (e.g., Lee, 2022). Therefore, expect students may need additional instruction and time to practice skills at the start of each school year.

Section Two: Using the DESSA Assessments for Multi-Tiered SEL

MTSS is a prevention-focused approach to education that addresses the needs of all students through data-driven systems and services. Figure 7 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 students need to be successful.

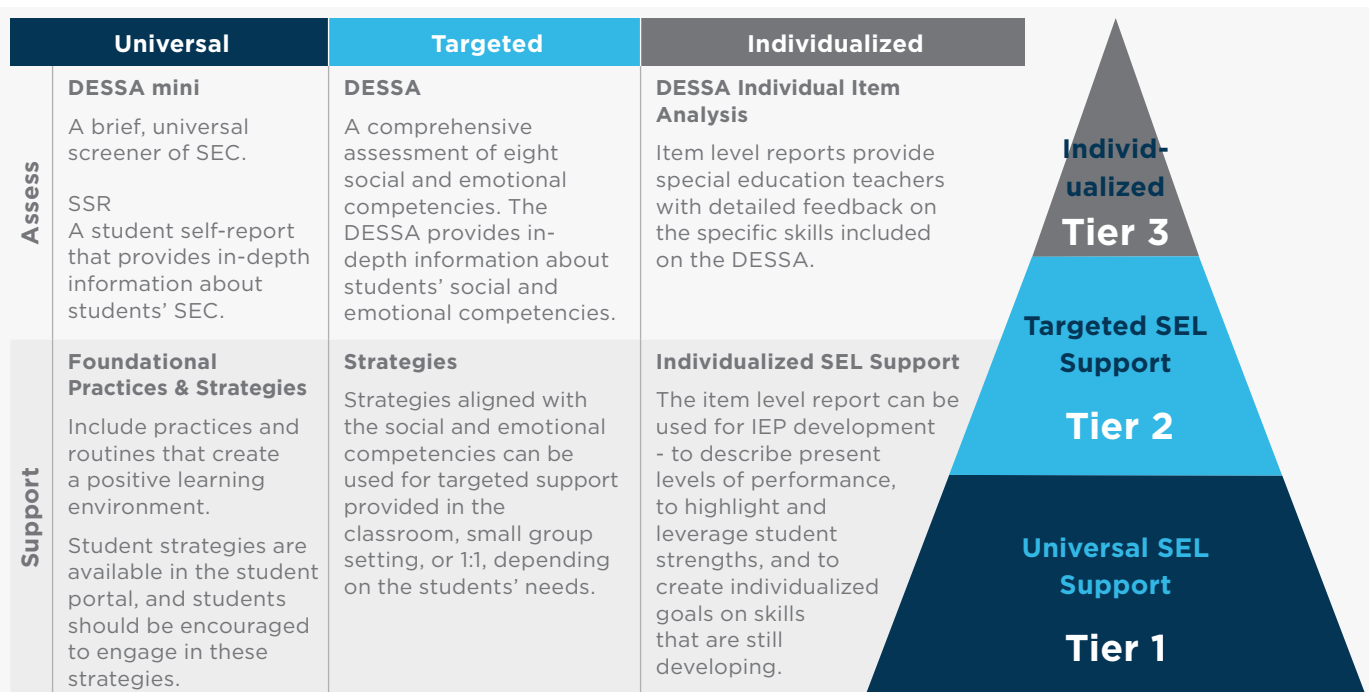|	Universal	Targeted	Individualized	
Assess	**DESSA mini** A brief, universal screener of SEC. SSR A student self-report that provides in-depth information about students' SEC.	**DESSA** A comprehensive assessment of eight social and emotional competencies. The DESSA provides in-depth information about 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 & Strategies** Include practices and routines that create a positive learning environment. Student strategies are available in the student portal, and students should be encouraged to engage in these strategies.	**Strategies** 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 leverage student strengths, and to create individualized goals on skills that are still developing.	**Targeted SEL Support** **Tier 2** **Universal SEL Support** **Tier 1**

Figure 7. The Aperture system aligns with an 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.

To implement the DESSA assessments during the school year, students and teachers need to be prepared to complete their ratings, SEL teams must have a plan for administering the assessments, and there needs to be a plan to review and respond to the data.

The checklist below is designed for school or SEL team leaders and focuses on the planning aspects of implementation. The schedule for when these steps should be completed should be determined and communicated prior to the beginning of the school year. School staff will need to be adequately prepared for completing their DESSA-mini and DESSA ratings. For planning purposes, note that the DESSA-mini takes about 1 minute to complete per student; the DESSA takes about 5 minutes per student.

SEL Team Leader Planning for DESSA-mini and DESSA Implementation Checklist*

- [ ] 1. Ensure that teachers have training on the DESSA. Training should include how to complete the DESSA-mini and the DESSA. Training should also include how to review and understand results of these measures.

- [ ] 2. Designate a rating window for your first DESSA-mini and DESSA rating between 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 whose DESSA-mini results indicate a need for instruction.

- [ ] 5. Create a process and schedule time to review results at school, grade, and class levels.

- [ ] 6. Schedule when you will complete mid-year ratings. Schedule a reminder to teachers 4-6 weeks prior, so they are prepared to complete their ratings.

- [ ] 7. Schedule when you will complete end-of-year ratings. Schedule a reminder to teachers 4-6 weeks prior, so they are prepared to complete their ratings.

- [ ] 8. 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 middle school has an advisory period, that teacher would be a good choice.
>
> 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 the DESSA ratings.

Teacher Planning for DESSA Implementation Checklist

☐ 1. Attend and complete the Introduction to the Aperture System for Educators Training and Analyzing Data in the Aperture System 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 on the DESSA-mini.

☐ 7. 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).

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).

Additionally, the Aperture System includes a set of Foundational Practices (see Figure 8) that provides school teams with ideas on the universal practices they can implement to support their students' social and emotional development.
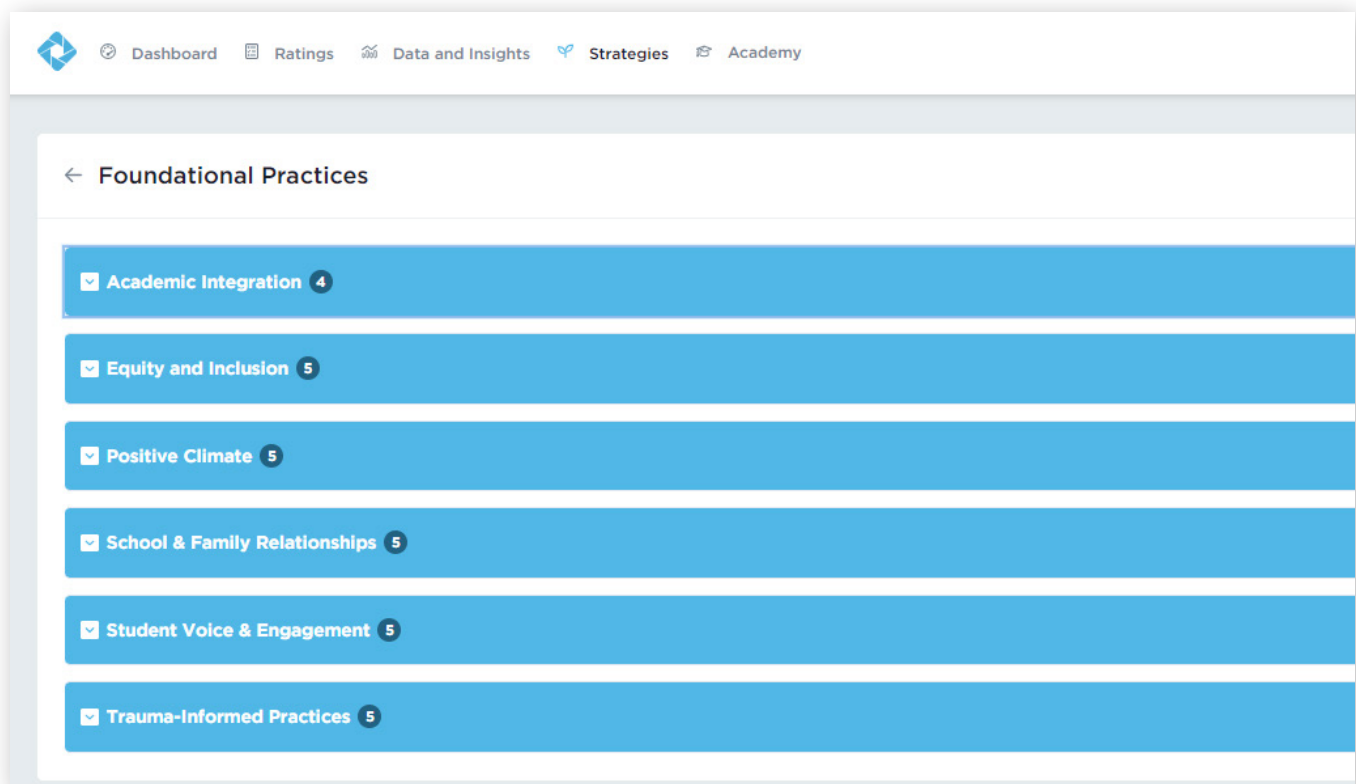

Figure 8. Foundational Practices included in the Aperture System

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 9 includes a screenshot of the 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 9. Growth Strategies included in the Aperture System

Universal screening using 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 two to three 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 10, 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 educational administrators.
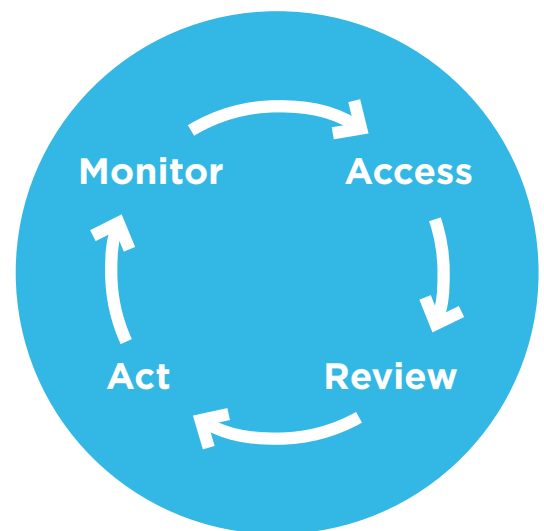

Figure 10. Recommended data review process

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 3.

Table 3. *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 and/or SSR results at the school level – 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; the results should be considered along with other data and information about the student – for example, attendance, achievement, engagement, and behavior.	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 (16 – 68 – 16); School continuous improvement plan
3. If the results are not consistent with the 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 to support their SEL implementation, 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 SET *T*-score
d. Create a plan or goal to address any areas of growth you have discovered.	

*Refer to the Site Leader Reports Guide in the Support Portal for instructions on how to pull the reports.

*Students scoring in the need for instruction range should be assessed with the full DESSA to understand better how to support their specific needs.

**If your results indicate significantly more students demonstrating a need, you may choose to prioritize support to students with very low SET or SEC *T*-scores (35 and below) first, then move on to students with SET or SEC *T*-scores in the 36 to 40 range. If not already in place, you may also consider prioritizing an expanded implementation of universal SEL efforts.

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 4.

Table 4. 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.	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 or Tier 1 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 an 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?

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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.

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 11 for ongoing progress monitoring. As shown in Figure 11, 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.

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
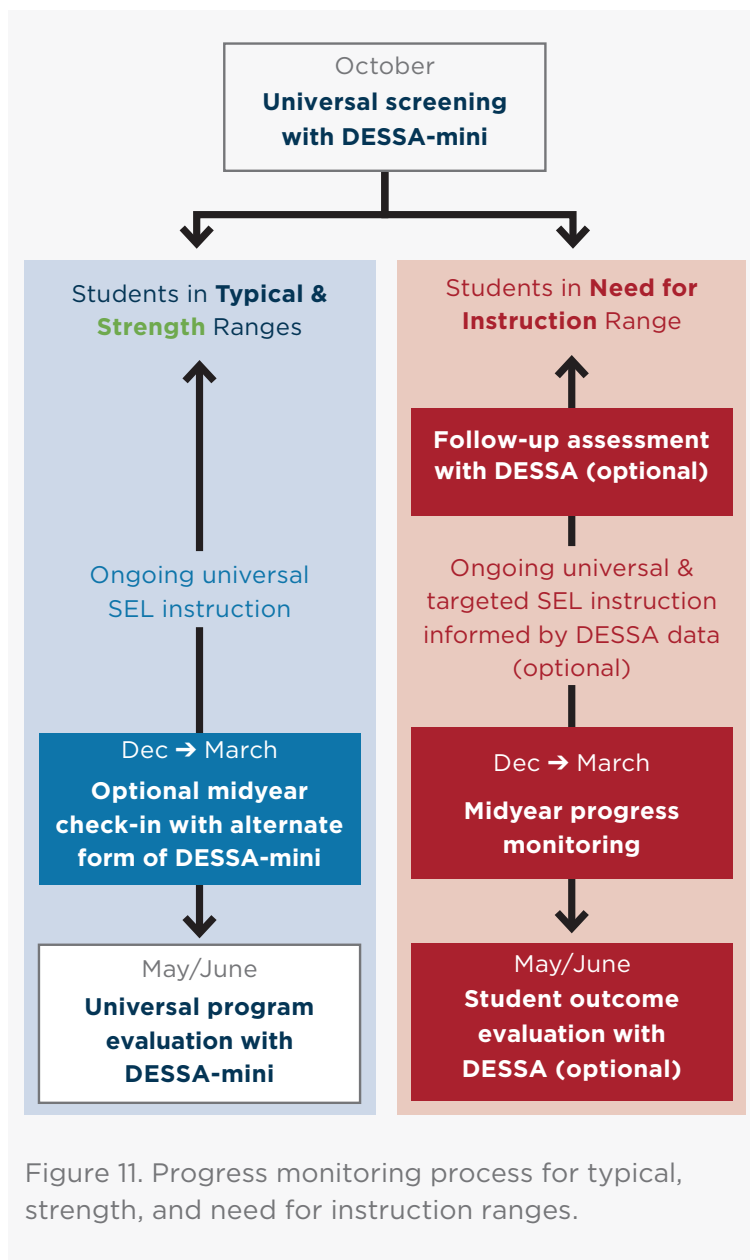**Student outcome evaluation with DESSA (optional)**

Figure 11. 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' social and emotional competence, growth can take time, and it takes a focused, schoolwide effort. Some students could **decline**. For example, students who experience hardship or traumatic life events between assessments may show lower social and emotional competence at follow-up. There is evidence that students experience a decline in social and emotional competence in adolescence and in transition years, so DESSA results for middle school students may be lower than other grades. Data provided through the DESSA 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 social and emotional competence over the school year but decline over the summer (e.g., Lee, 2022). Therefore, expect students may need additional instruction and time to practice skills at the start of each school year.

- **It is 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 middle school students who need additional supports 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 and identify the SEL skills they need to develop and when to use them (McClelland & Wanless, 2012; Montroy et al., 2014).

There are a variety of approaches for providing targeted SEL supports to middle school 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 chool'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 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, and 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, such as those included in the Aperture system. Our Tier 2 programs can be delivered by a teacher or counselor and include additional instruction for key social, emotional, and/or behavioral skills. Our Tier 2 programs align with the competencies measured by the DESSA and include between 12 - 24 lessons that help students develop the skills they need to be successful.

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 Strategies included in the Aperture System focus on key skills and competencies.

Aperture's Tier 2 Programs

The Tier 2 interventions include 5 programs designed for targeted small groups of students who need additional support to build their social and emotional skills. Programs include between 12 - 24 lessons that can be implemented as part of a school's Tier 2 SEL programming.

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 about 5 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 optimistic thinking and decision-making skills.
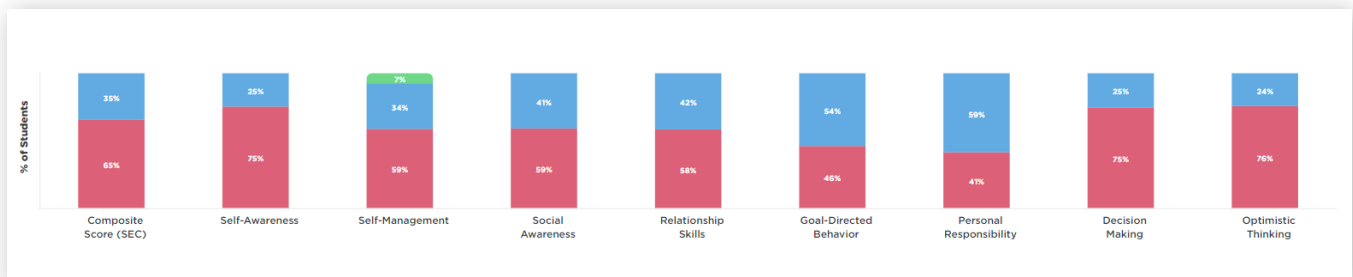
2. Results can be used to create small groups. For example, students with similar needs might receive targeted instruction on that competency within a small group. If small group instruction is not possible, students can and should also be provided the opportunity to practice skills within the general classroom setting. In the *Student Breakout* figure below, a school team could consider placing students with relationship skills in the typical range together since this is a relative strength that can be leveraged to build their other competencies. Teachers can also pair students who have complementary competencies to encourage peer-assisted learning, structured peer feedback, and a collaborative approach to social and emotional skill development.

Student Competency Breakdown

Export CSV

	SEC	SA	SM	SO	RS	GB	PR	DM	OT
Johnston, Lexie	29	28	35	28	29	36	38	28	28
Frost, Isla	29	28	35	28	29	36	38	28	28
Hodge, Forest	29	28	35	28	29	36	38	28	28
Barry, Amira	29	28	35	28	29	36	38	28	28
Roberts, Yara	30	34	28	34	36	29	31	31	39
Bradford, Elaine	30	34	28	34	36	29	31	31	39
Pena, Kaleb	30	34	28	34	36	29	31	31	39
Rivas, Mariah	30	34	28	34	36	29	31	31	39
Preston, Johan	31	33	34	32	34	30	32	37	37
Burch, Addilynn	31	33	34	32	34	30	32	37	37
May, Keily	31	33	34	32	34	30	32	37	37
Farley, Kamryn	32	33	31	33	42	31	33	38	32
Torres, Eleanor	32	33	31	33	42	31	33	38	32
Wolfe, Persephone	33	41	31	31	40	30	33	35	39
Villanueva, Ayan	33	41	31	31	40	30	33	35	39
Santana, Ishaan	33	41	31	31	40	30	33	35	39
Klein, Jon	33	41	31	31	40	30	33	35	39
Nolan, Nicolas	34	36	37	34	38	37	35	35	34
Espinoza, Sebastian	35	36	38	37	42	33	33	37	34
Coffey, Juelz	35	36	38	37	42	33	33	37	34
Price, Colette	35	36	38	37	42	33	33	37	34

3. If you are also using Aperture's Strategies and Intervention Package, you will receive data-driven recommendations for strategies and for Tier 2 programs based on your students' DESSA results.

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

Data-Driven Recommendations

These SEL strategies and interventions are identified based on your students' ratings results. Each strategy offers opportunities to strengthen and grow your students' SEL competencies.

Filters

Strength
Build on your students' strengths, confidence, and resilience with this strategy.

Strategy 1: Encourage Student Voice Core Competence: Relationship Skills	Use Strategy ⌄

Growth
Help your students grow their SEL skills with these two strategies.

Strategy 2: Focus on SEL Core Competence: Self-Awareness	Use Strategy ⌄
Strategy 3: Student Leaders Core Competence: Responsible Decision Making	Use Strategy ⌄

Tier II Programs
For more intensive interventions, try the following Tier II Intervention Program:

Social Awareness & Behavior Regulation

View all Intervention Programs

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 other 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 5 provides a suggested process for SEL teams to review DESSA results to inform Targeted SEL programming.

Table 5. *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 DESSA 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 middle 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 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

*Refer to the Site Leader Reports Guide in the Support Portal for instructions on how to pull the reports.

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 as a team 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 trends in attendance, academic performance, conduct, suspensions, etc. 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 create an action plan to collect fidelity data, to review the alignment of program focus to student needs, or 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 social and emotional competence. To monitor progress, you will look at the students' DESSA SEC as well as scores across the 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 18 to 34%. 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
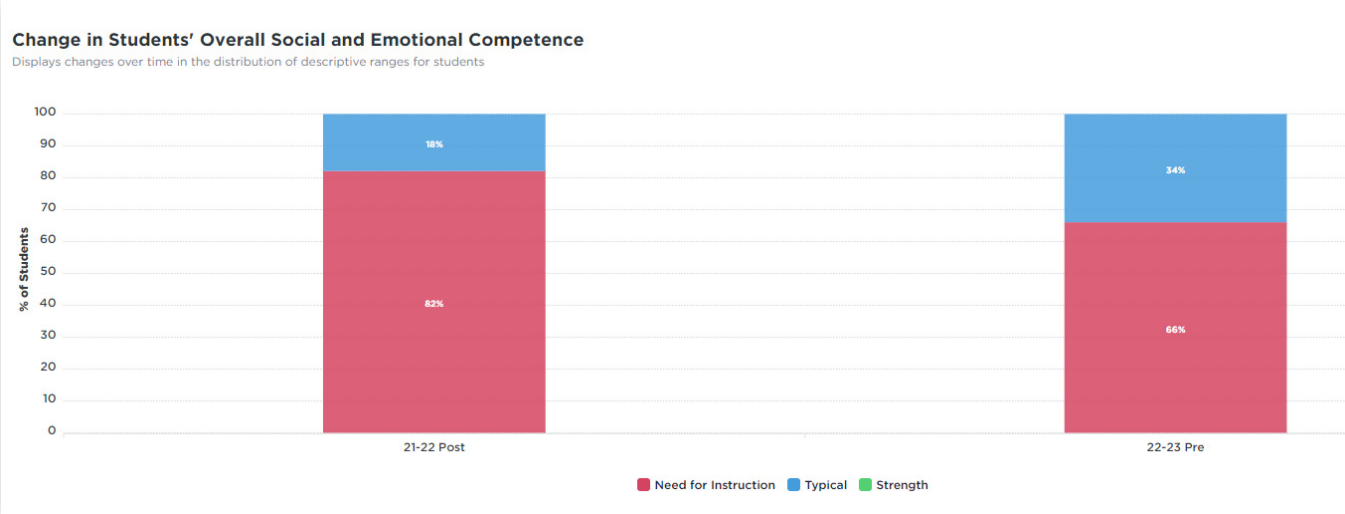
The Impact Report also provides a Student Movement graph, which indicates student movement across the strength – typical – need range. In the sample below, a school reviewed student status from the end of the prior year to the beginning of the new year. As seen in the figure, 27 of the 115 students who had a need for instruction are now in the typical range; 5 of the 25 students who had scores in the typical range are now in the need for instruction range.

Based on this data, the team should continue with their targeted SEL supports and conduct a mid-year rating to look at student movement to determine whether students are benefitting from targeted SEL efforts.
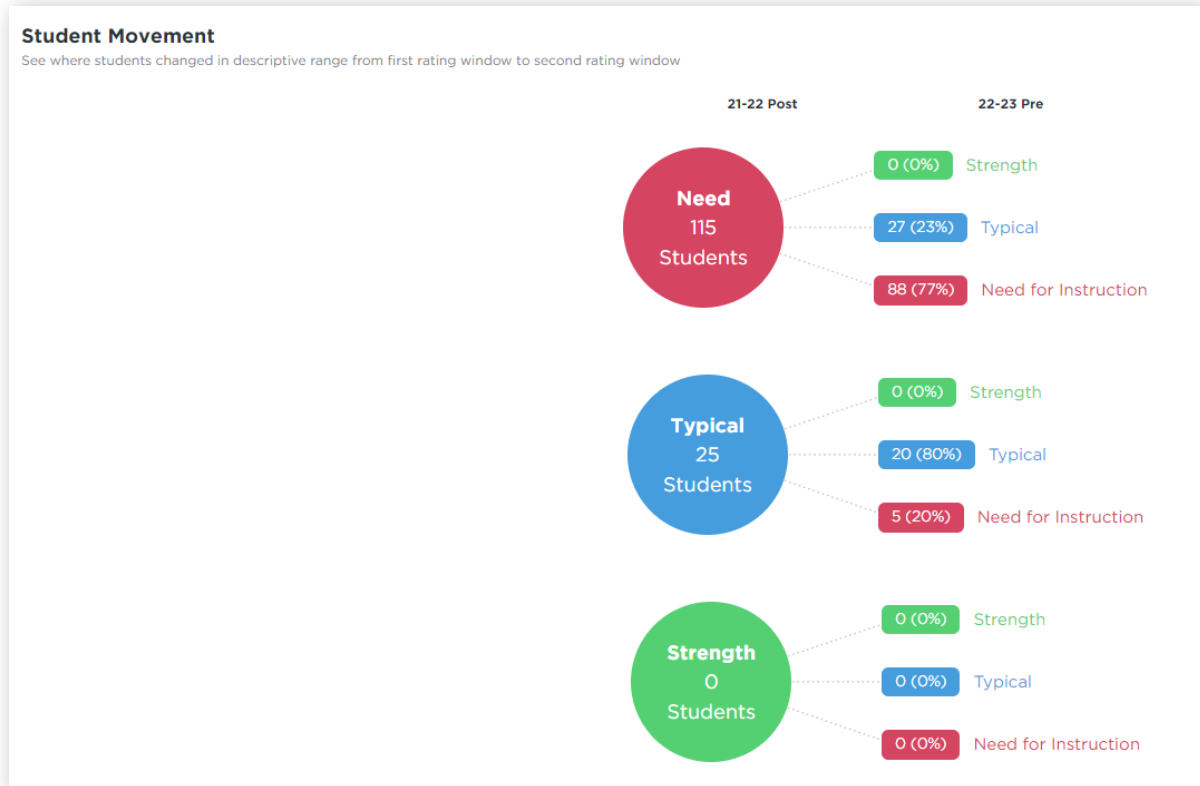
The Impact Report includes the Change in DESSA Social and Emotional Competencies. In the sample figure below, a team can see that the largest changes were made in the areas of self-management, decision making, and personal responsibility. If these competencies were the focus of targeted supports, the 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.
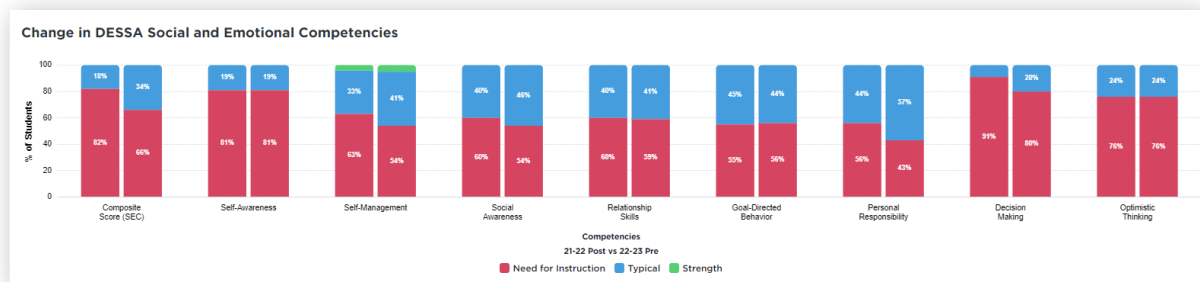
Finally, teams can review individual student progress. By looking at an individual student's results using the My Students report, a team can determine whether a specific student is making adequate progress with the targeted supports provided.

In the fictitious student example below, you can see that Ander seems to be responding to the supports he received during the 2022-23 school year. Given the growth he made the team should continue with the programming they put in place when Ander returns to school in the 23-24 year.
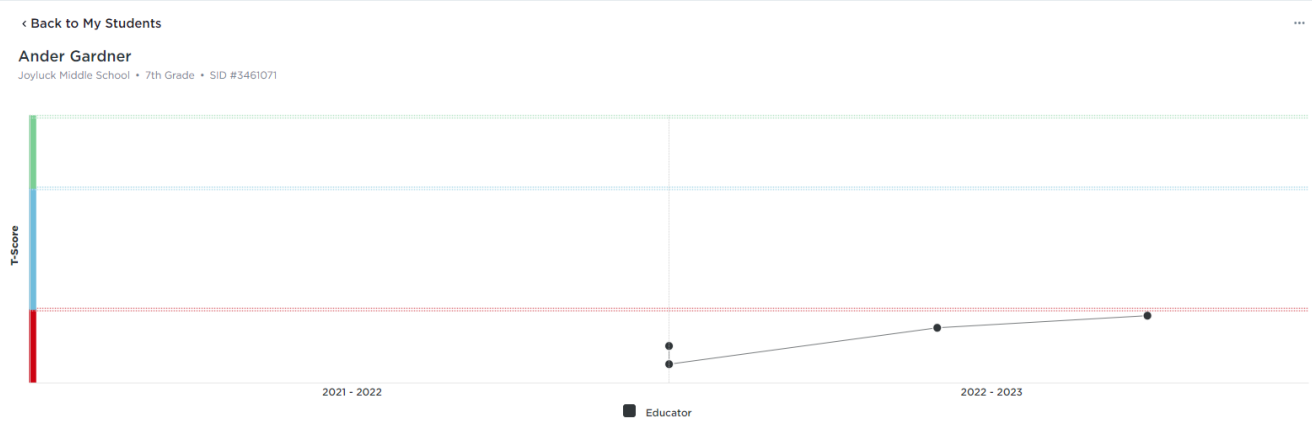

Figure 12. Sample Individual Student Report

Based on a student's results, decisions can be made about whether a change in the supports provided are needed. Table 6 below provides guidance for interpreting changes in *T*-scores and guidance on whether instructional changes are needed.

Table 6. 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	Supports are moderately effective. Continue what you are doing. If resources permit, consider enhancing support.
Large change	8 or more	Supports are working well. Continue current plan.

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

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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. Additionally, 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. It is helpful 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.

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.
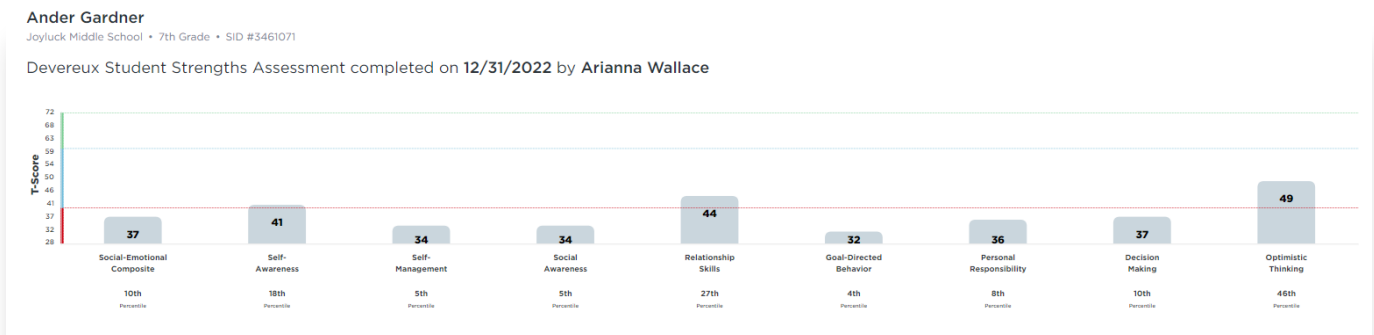
Using the DESSA to Inform Individualized (Tier 3) SEL Programming

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 Ander Gardner's DESSA composite score (SEC), and then includes his score for each competency.

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

Devereux Student Strengths Assessment completed on **12/31/2022** 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

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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-Awareness. Although Ander's results indicated a need for instruction for some items, he does have skills to be flexible, as seen by the responses to the first three items. Within each social and emotional competency, the item analysis provides feedback on the specific skills that may be relative strengths (e.g., in the strength or typical categories), and those that indicate a need for instruction.

Individual Item Analysis — Self-Awareness

Competency	Item	Response	Category
Self-Awareness	ask questions to clarify what they did not understand?	Frequently	Typical
Self-Awareness	describe how they were feeling?	Frequently	Typical
Self-Awareness	give an opinion when asked?	Frequently	Typical
Self-Awareness	make accurate statements about events in their life?	Occasionally	Need
Self-Awareness	teach another person to do something?	Never	Need
Self-Awareness	show an awareness of their personal strengths?	Occasionally	Need
Self-Awareness	ask somebody for feedback?	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 social and emotional competencies.

For example, Ander's DESSA results in Relationship Skills show a *T*-score of 44, which is in the typical range. An individual item analysis of this competency provides the team with detailed information that can guide IEP planning. For example, with Ander's relative strength in Relationship Skills, the team could provide more opportunities for him to work as part of a group to develop his skills in other areas.

Individual Item Analysis — Relationship Skills

Competency	Item	Response	Category
Relationship Skills	show appreciation of others?	Frequently	Typical
Relationship Skills	greet a person in a polite way?	Frequently	Typical
Relationship Skills	attract positive attention from adults?	Frequently	Typical
Relationship Skills	make a suggestion or request in a polite way?	Frequently	Typical

2. Review the Data

Once the team/teacher has the individual student's results, they can engage in a review process as outlined in Table 7 to get started with individualized SEL programming.

Table 7. *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 DESSA 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.	
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 trends in attendance, academic performance, conduct, suspensions, etc. can help to put the DESSA results in context and prioritize action steps.

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 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.
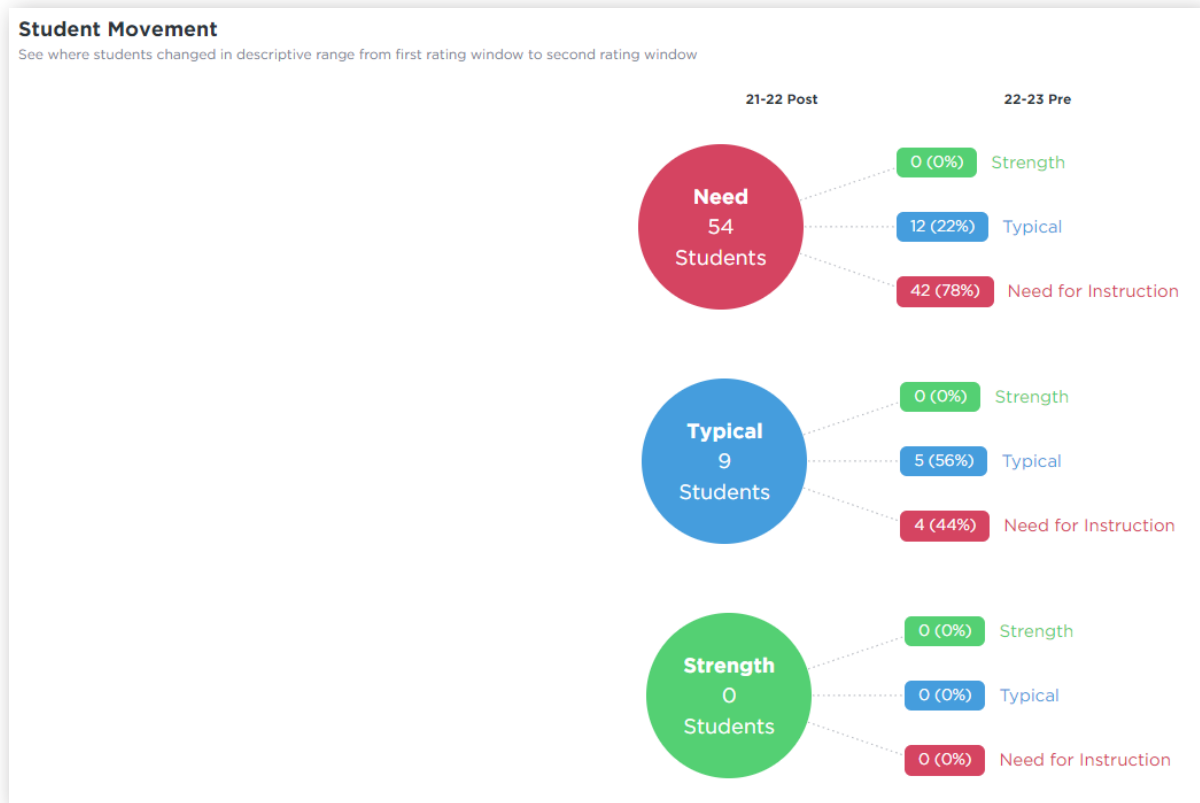
4. Monitor progress

Progress monitoring at the individualized level lets you know whether the student's SEL supports 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 13% of students were able to improve their social emotional skills to the typical range (from 14% to 27%). The team can also take 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
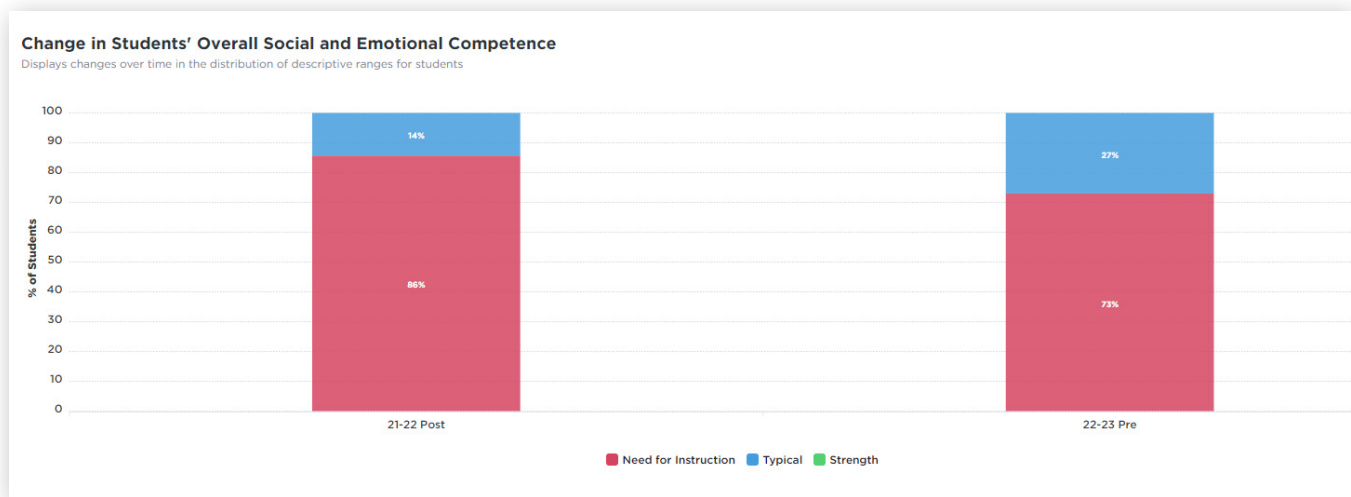
The student movement figure provides more specific information. In this example, we see that 12 out of 54 students whose DESSA ratings indicated a need for instruction moved to the typical category. 42 out of the 54 students remained in the need for instruction category (e.g., there was no movement to different categories).

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

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 49% to 75%) and Optimistic Thinking (from 30% to 49%), but a slight decrease in in the percentage of students in the typical range for Social Awareness (from 33% to 32%) and Decision Making (from 44% to 43%).

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.

Change in DESSA Social and Emotional Competencies
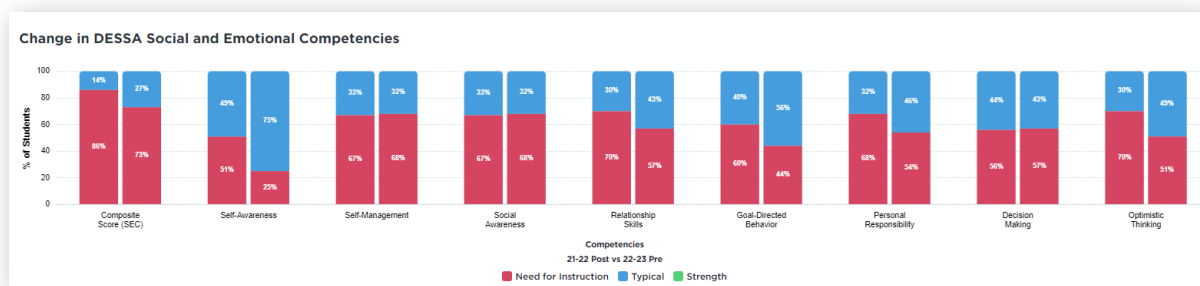
Section Three:
Using SSR and DESSA data together

It can be helpful to use both the SSR and the DESSA to get a complete picture of students' SEC and to compare and reconcile teacher ratings with students' self-reported ratings. In this section, we outline a process for schools using both the teacher and student versions of the DESSA to get the most from their data and inform their SEL programming.

For more detailed implementation guidance on these assessments see Sections One and Two.

Tier 1 and Tier 2 Review

To compare outcomes of student and teacher ratings, an SEL team can use the questions in Table 8 to guide the process. Currently, to compare data, an SEL team will have to pull reports separately in the Aperture System, print or save them, and then compare the results off-line.

Figures 13 & 14 show sample overall results for the DESSA-mini and for the SSR. In this example, students have reported much greater levels of need for instruction than teachers indicated on the DESSA-mini. The SEL team can use the process outlined in Table 8 to consider their results. This process can also be used to review results for students receiving Tier 2 or Targeted Supports.
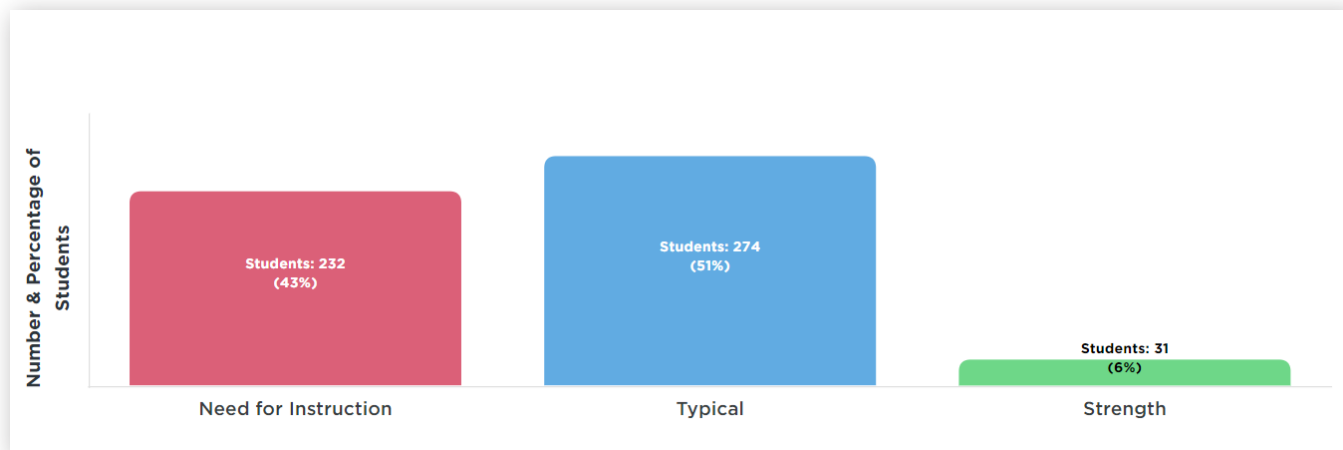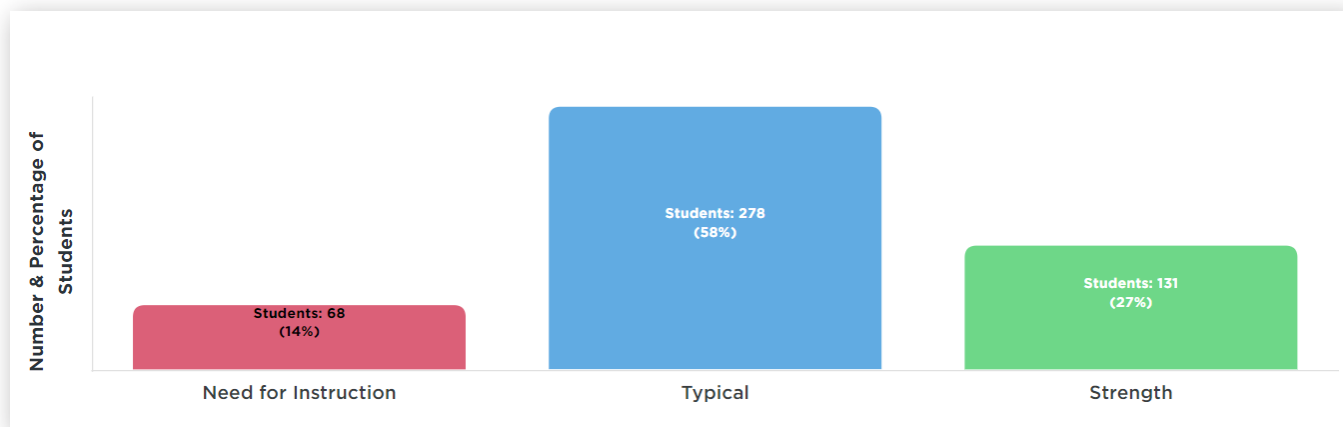
Figures 13 & 14. Sample student and teacher ratings comparison

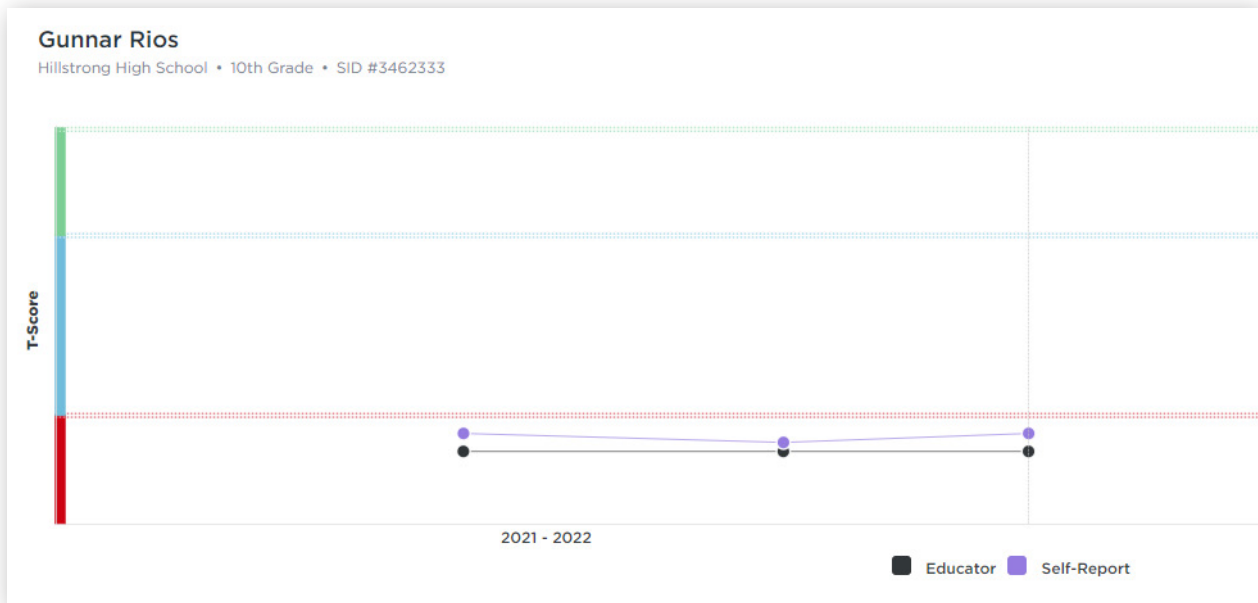Table 8. Suggested process for reviewing and comparing SSR and DESSA-mini results

Questions to consider as you review disaggregated data	Data Sources
1. Compare DESSA-mini universal screening school level results with results from the SSR- 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 and CASEL's Guiding Questions for Educators to reflect on disaggregated results.	Guiding Questions for Educators
2. Are the results generally similar between teacher and student ratings? If so, this *suggests* shared understanding of the social emotional competencies included on the DESSA. Keep up the good work and continue with your school's SEL implementation efforts.	
3. If the results between teacher and student groups differ significantly, consider the following questions as a team. To address these questions, the SEL team should also consider coordinating discussion groups with students to gain insight into the situation.	
a. Have students and staff received adequate training to effectively implement the use of the DESSA-mini and SSR?	SEL implementation plan
b. Do students understand the importance of completing the self-report measure accurately?	Student focus groups
c. On what basis are students completing their ratings? Students may draw on out-of-school contexts to respond to the SSR.	Student focus groups
d. Do teachers and students have shared understanding of the competencies and skills included on the DESSA? Class discussions that focus on the definitions of the competencies and why they are important can be helpful.	
e. Are there specific competencies in which students are reporting more need for instruction? Prioritize one or two competencies for schoolwide focus and use the growth strategies in the Aperture System (or relevant lessons from your school's SEL curriculum) to address these.	Competencies Report

*Refer to the Site Leader Reports Guide in the Support Portal for instructions on how to pull the reports.

The SSR and the DESSA can be used within a Tier 3 system to inform IEP and transition planning. In this way, students receiving Tier 3 SEL supports can actively participate in their individualized learning and goal setting. Results across measures can be used to support rich conversations about a student's SEL development and learning needs.

Figures 15 and 16 show a student's SSR and DESSA results over time. In this example, the student and teacher ratings are very consistent. In this scenario, the teacher and student can collaborate to identify areas of strengths the student can leverage to develop skills in other areas. The teacher can support the student to engage in challenges included within the student portal.

Gunnar Rios
Hillstrong High School • 10th Grade • SID #3462333

2021 - 2022

■ Educator ■ Self-Report

	Rating Date	Rating Window	Descriptive Range	T-Score	Percentile	Form	Grade At Rating
☐	12/31/2021	21-22 Mid	Need	35	7th	DESSA-HSE mini Form 1	10th Grade
☐	12/31/2021	21-22 Mid	Need	36	8th	DESSA-HSE	10th Grade
☐	01/01/2022	21-22 Mid	Need	38	12th	DESSA-HSE-SSR	10th Grade
☐	05/01/2022	21-22 Post	Need	36	8th	DESSA-HSE	10th Grade
☐	05/01/2022	21-22 Post	Need	37	10th	DESSA-HSE-SSR	10th Grade
☐	07/31/2022	22-23 Pre	Need	36	8th	DESSA-HSE	10th Grade
☐	08/01/2022	22-23 Pre	Need	38	12th	DESSA-HSE-SSR	10th Grade

Figures 15 & 16. Sample of student and teacher ratings across time.

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 to best fit their needs.

As a strengths-based assessment of social and emotional competence, 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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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.