



# User's Guide to the DESSA Second Step<sup>®</sup> Assessments

## Section 1: What are the DESSA Second Step® Assessments?

The DESSA Second Step® Assessments are a suite of strength-based, behavior rating scales aligned with the [Second Step® programs](#). Although there are different editions of the DESSA Second Step® Assessments, every assessment is:

- ✓ Standardized and norm-referenced,
- ✓ A reliable and valid measure of students' social and emotional skills,
- ✓ Strength-based – items ask about positive behaviors and focus on students' strengths,
- ✓ Easy to implement, with automatically generated reports to guide your decision-making.

There are several use cases for the DESSA Second Step® assessments. DESSA users should have training in the interpretation and use of the data obtained from these assessments prior to getting started. You can refer to the manual for the specific version of the DESSA Second Step® assessment you are using.

Schools can use the DESSA Second Step® Assessments to:

1. **Assess students' social and emotional competence.** The DESSA Second Step® assessments provide a reliable and valid indicator of an individual student's social and emotional competence.
2. **Evaluate and monitor students' response to Second Step® instruction.** Because these assessments are aligned to Second Step® programs, they provide an indication of a student's ability to demonstrate taught skills.
3. **Inform instructional planning.** You can use data at the individual, class, grade, and school level to inform your Second Step® instructional decisions and determine if reteaching or more support for some students is needed.
4. **Program evaluation of Second Step®.** Review growth and outcomes to determine the impact of Second Step® program implementation.

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. Each version of the DESSA Second Step<sup>®</sup> assessments reports a Social-Emotional Composite (SEC) score, and a score for each of the competencies included in that Second Step<sup>®</sup> program. *T*-scores are categorized into three descriptive ranges:

- Strength** = scores of 60 and above;
- Typical** = scores between 41-59 inclusive;
- Need for Instruction** = scores of 40 and below.

Strength	Typical	Need for Instruction
<p>Students with results in the strength range likely have well-developed social and emotional skills.</p> <p>Continued work developing their social and emotional skills will help them thrive and serve as protective factors to build resilience so they can navigate future challenges.</p>	<p>Students in the typical range are on their way to developing strong social and emotional skills.</p> <p>Continued work through explicit teaching of skills can help students in this range grow.</p> <p>Consider reteaching or providing support to students whose <i>T</i>-score is &lt; 45 to proactively target their skills development.</p>	<p>Students with results in this range should be considered for Tier 2 support.</p> <p>Reviewing scale and item performance can identify specific skills to work on. In Tier 1, working on skills in class provides an authentic way to support growth.</p> <p>The Tier 2 intervention programs available as part of the Strategies and Intervention Package (SIP) within the Aperture System can be used with small groups.</p>

The DESSA Second Step<sup>®</sup> Assessments can be completed by two types of raters: educators and students. The table below highlights the general features of each.

Educator Completed	Student Self-Report
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Items and scales are aligned to the Second Step<sup>®</sup> programs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Items and scales are aligned to the Second Step<sup>®</sup> programs.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Educators and administrators have immediate access to results, data, and reports.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Students receive their results immediately. Educators and administrators have immediate access to student results, data, and reports.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Assessments take between 3-5 minutes to complete per student.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Assessments take under 10 minutes for students to complete.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Educators should have sufficient opportunity to observe the student before rating.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Student-completed DESSA Second Step<sup>®</sup> assessments promote student voice and agency.</li> </ul>

## Section 2: Implementing the DESSA Second Step® Assessments

**Getting Started.** Implementing the DESSA Second Step® assessments effectively requires planning. To help guide this process, we've developed checklists for Site Leaders and Educators. There is also a checklist for sites that plan to use the DESSA Second Step® Student Self-Report assessments.

### Site Leader DESSA Second Step® Implementation Checklist

- 1. Ensure that teachers have training on how to complete the DESSA and how to review the results.
- 2. Designate a rating window for your first DESSA rating about 4-6 weeks after school starts.
- 3. Provide time for teachers to complete DESSA ratings. For example, some sites designate a common day or period to ensure all ratings are completed.
- 4. Create a process and schedule time to review results at school, grade, and class levels.
- 5. Schedule a time to complete mid-year and/or end of year ratings. Schedule a reminder to teachers 4-6 weeks prior, so they are prepared to complete their ratings.

### Educator DESSA Second Step® Implementation Checklist

- 1. Attend and complete two trainings -the Introduction to the Aperture System for Educators, and the Analyzing Data in the Aperture System training.
- 2. Become familiar with the DESSA Second Step® items. You might also consider rating someone you know with your colleagues for practice.
- 3. Plan your observations strategically – what activities provide opportunities to observe the skills included in the DESSA?
- 4. Ensure you have scheduled time to complete your ratings. Your school team might have a schoolwide schedule or provide a window to complete them.
- 5. Schedule time to review your classroom's results and use the results to guide your instructional decisions.

### Student Self-Report DESSA Second Step<sup>®</sup> Implementation Checklist

- 1. Provide training for students on the importance of social and emotional skills, and help them understand why it is important for them to complete the student self-report (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 ratings. Ensure they can complete the SSR in a quiet setting free from distractions.
- 5. Schedule time for teachers and school leaders to review SSR results.

**Analyze DESSA Data.** The results of the DESSA Second Step<sup>®</sup> assessments should be reviewed to inform decisions about Second Step<sup>®</sup> implementation at the school and classroom levels, and can be used to inform decisions about individual students. After each rating period, teams and educators should engage in a data-review process that includes four steps: 1) access the data, 2) review the data, 3) act on the data, and 4) monitor progress.

#### Step 1. Access the Data

There are a variety of reports available in the Aperture System. You can read about these reports and how to access them in the *Site Leaders Reports Guide*, available in the Aperture Support Portal.

#### Step 2. Review the Data

Data review includes looking at the results at the school, classroom, and student levels. The review process should include your site’s Data Team and other key stakeholders. School teams should dedicate sufficient time for data review.

After each rating period, teams should engage in a process like the one outlined in the table below.

Suggested Process to Review DESSA Second Step <sup>®</sup> Results	Data Sources
1. Review DESSA results at the school level – check the percentage of students in the strength, typical, and need for instruction categories. Expected distribution is 16-68-16.	Dashboard or My Students Report
2. Review by Grade Level or Class – are there any grades or classroom level reports that differ significantly from the school report?	Grade Level Report
3. Review by student population – are there differences in results based on racial, ethnic, gender, or other student groups?	Grade Level Report
4. If your school, grade, or classroom level results are consistent with your school’s goals, celebrate your team’s accomplishments!	School Continuous Improvement Plan

5. If the results are not consistent with what was expected, work with your team to:	
a. Collect additional data to better understand the situation.	Observations, Other student data
b. Review results to determine how best to provide support. For example, teachers may need professional development to support their Second Step <sup>®</sup> implementation, or they may need additional time to teach specific units.	Second Step <sup>®</sup> implementation data, PLC information
c. Create a plan or goal to address any areas of growth you have discovered.	School Improvement Plan
6. For students whose results suggest a need for instruction, review individual student level data. DESSA results should be considered along with other data and information about the student – for example, attendance, achievement, engagement, and behavior.	My Students Report < Individual Student Rating Report
a. Based on this comprehensive review of data, decide if the student would benefit from reteaching skills taught within the Second Step <sup>®</sup> program or would benefit from a Tier 2 (targeted) intervention. For sites that have purchased the Strategies and Intervention Package (SIP), these intervention programs are available in the Aperture System.	Tier 2 Programs

### Step 3. Act on the Data

**Site Leaders.** Once you have reviewed your data, it is time to set goals and create an action plan. Teams should set goals for Second Step<sup>®</sup> implementation and goals for improving student outcomes. See the text box for questions that can guide the development of your action plan.

### Questions to Guide Improvement of Second Step<sup>®</sup> Programming.

1. Have adequate resources been provided to support Second Step<sup>®</sup> programming (e.g., budget, professional learning, and dedicated time for instruction and practice)?
2. Is the Second Step<sup>®</sup> program implementation assessed regularly using the data from your Second Step program dashboard, and is the information used for continuous quality improvement?
3. How is your school working to ensure equitable social and emotional outcomes?

**Educators.** You can review data at the classroom and individual student report. At the classroom level, you can review how students are doing across the competencies in the Second Step<sup>®</sup> program you are using. If you find that there is an area where DESSA scores are generally lower than others, you might decide to reteach lessons from that unit and/or provide more opportunities in your classroom for students to practice these skills. You can use the supplemental resources provided

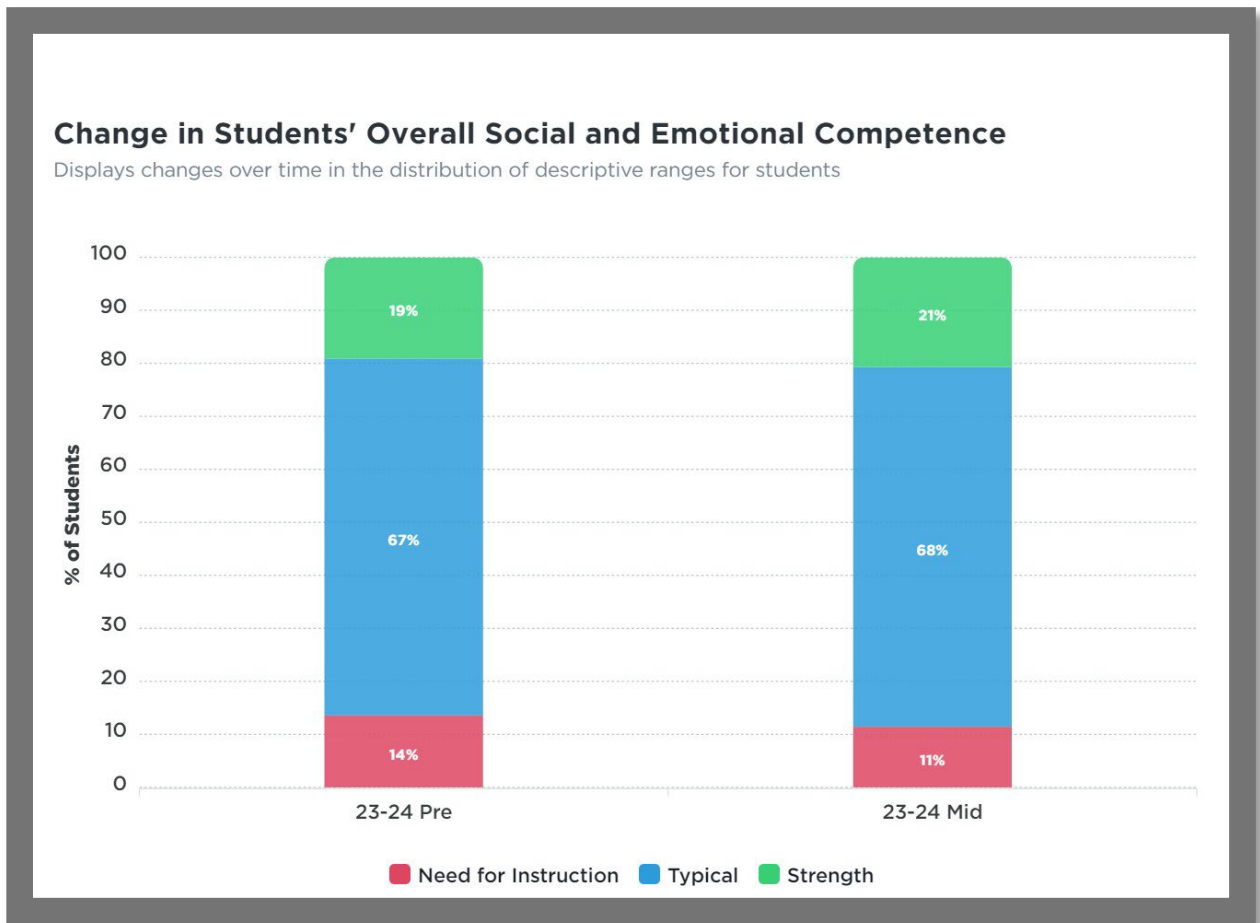


with the Elementary and Middle School Second Step<sup>®</sup> programs for ideas. At the individual student level, you can use results in a similar way – students with lower scores in some competencies might benefit from small group or targeted reteaching of lessons.

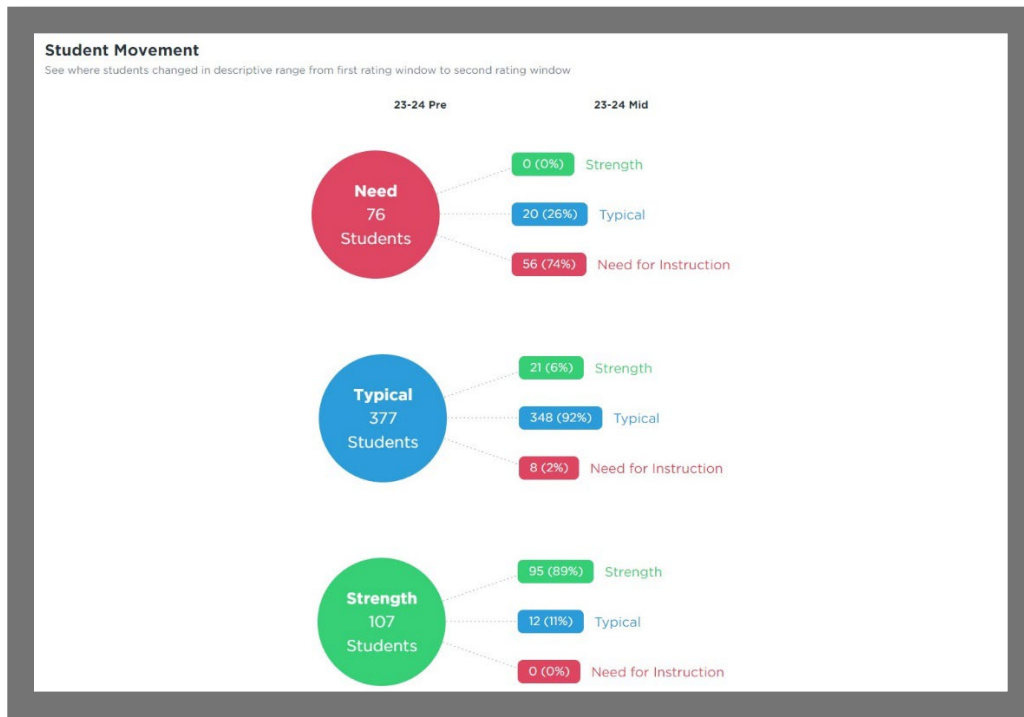
#### Step 4. Monitor Progress

The DESSA Second Step<sup>®</sup> assessments can be administered up to three times during the year, in the fall, winter, and spring. Results can be reviewed at the school, grade, class, and student levels to see how results are changing over time. You can also review disaggregated data so you can determine whether growth is equitable for different groups of students.

The Impact Report allows you to compare the progress of students from one rating to the next.



The Student Movement report provides information on how many students with scores in one category (e.g., need for instruction), moved to a different category (e.g., typical) between ratings.



## Things to Consider when Reviewing Progress Monitoring Data

When looking for progress, be patient. Although the goal of Second Step<sup>®</sup> instruction is to build students' social and emotional competence, growth takes focused, schoolwide effort – especially for older students. If your results do not show growth, the first step is to review the implementation of your universal program. Next, review results for individual students, as some students' scores could decline. For example, students who experience hardship or traumatic life events between assessments may show lower scores at follow-up. Data can help teams determine whether and when students need additional support.

- It is important to identify students with declining scores and consider reviewing other data to assess and better understand their needs.
- Students that do not respond to universal Second Step<sup>®</sup> programming should be provided targeted instruction as appropriate.
- Reviewing results by competency gives more detailed information about students' social and emotional competencies and can inform universal Second Step<sup>®</sup> instruction.



### Section 3: Using the DESSA-mini and the DESSA Second Step® Assessments

The recommended use case for the DESSA Second Step® Assessments is to have educators complete the appropriate version of the assessment on every student in their classroom. This ensures that educators will receive helpful feedback on their students' progress developing the skills taught in the Second Step® curriculum.

Some sites may choose to use the DESSA-mini to screen all students, and then to administer a DESSA Second Step® assessment only for students whose screening results fall in the **Need for Instruction** range. The benefit of this approach is that it can save time. The downside of this approach is that educators will not have data for all students on their progress towards the Second Step® competencies, which limits their ability to use the assessment to inform instructional decisions.

Therefore, we strongly encourage school sites to administer the DESSA Second Step® Assessments on every student.

However, if a site decides to move forward with a screening and follow up assessment approach, implementation follows a similar approach as outlined in Section 2 of this guide and is summarized here:

1. **Plan to screen all students three times per year with the DESSA-mini.** A typical screening schedule includes a beginning of year (about 4-6 weeks after school starts); a mid-year, and end of year rating. Schedule time to review your screening results and follow the data review process as outlined in Section 2.
2. **Assess students whose screening results fall in the Need for Instruction range using the DESSA Second Step® assessment.** As part of the planning process, ensure you provide educators time to conduct Second Step® assessments for about 15-20% of their students. Schedule time to review these results using the process outlined in Section 2. For example, if several students seem to be struggling with skills in a specific area, plan for reteaching and/or providing additional opportunities to practice these skills.
3. **Monitor students' progress.** The Impact Report, Student Movement Report, and Individual Student reports allow you to view progress from one administration to the next.