

Planning DESSA System Use During Back-to-School 2020-2021

It will be important to keep in mind that students will be returning after experiencing major disruptions to their lives. Many students have experienced increased worries about their basic needs being met; health concerns or fear about Covid-19; their family's financial situation; and the impact this has on their education, participation in sports or other extracurricular activities, and future plans for college (Margolius et al., 2020). As a result, you may observe more students who are demonstrating social, emotional, or behavioral concerns. The DESSA System resources, along with existing comprehensive school mental health programs and practices, will support your efforts to address these concerns.

As you plan for how to support students' social and emotional needs, we recommend that you consider the following DESSA System Resources:


- **Foundational Practices** (located on the Strategy tab in the DESSA System) are designed to support a positive classroom culture and climate, which helps to lay the foundation for supporting all students' social and emotional development.
- **Growth Strategies** (located on the Strategy tab in the DESSA System) are designed to support universal SEL instruction if you are not currently using a universal SEL curriculum. We recommend a universal SEL approach for all students as they return to school given the social and emotional impacts they may have experienced due to Covid-19.
- **Parent Resources** are provided through our Parent Portal. The Parent Portal (<https://apertureed.com/parent-portal/>) presents strategies and resources to engage families and have them reinforce SEL skills at home.
- **Educator Resources:** DESSA Teacher Reflection and Action strategies located within the Growth Strategies provide a way for educators to consider their own use of the DESSA competencies. You may also want to check out Aperture's newest resource called [EdSERT](#), designed to support the SEL and well-being of educators.

Guidance for Using the DESSA in a Hybrid Learning Environment (In-Person and Online Instruction)

Districts and OST programs who plan to begin the academic year with a hybrid approach to instruction, which may include a blend of both in-person and online instruction for students, may use the DESSA System resources with some minor modifications. We recommend the following:

- You may use the DESSA System resources as typically recommended as long as the amount of exposure is sufficient. In regards to the amount of exposure, it will be important to ensure that educators have sufficient opportunity to observe and interact with students prior to completing an initial universal DESSA-mini screening. Here are the guidelines for you to follow:
- An educator needs to spend at least two or more hours a day for at least three days a week during the four-week period (or roughly 24 hours of exposure to students). If educators do not have sufficient opportunity to observe students' behavior over the first four weeks, consider extending the observation period window to six or eight weeks to increase accuracy of ratings.
- Share the DESSA-mini Form 1 items with educators prior to the start of school. This will help raise their awareness and direct their attention to the social-emotional behaviors they will later be asked to rate.
- During virtual learning, behaviors related to Social-Awareness or Relationship Skills may be particularly difficult to observe. Encourage educators to probe for these behaviors during in-person learning through group activities or assignments.





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- You may see more students than the 16-20% that are generally expected to be within the Need for Instruction range while universally screening with the DESSA-mini, given the disruptions and impact of Covid-19 that students have experienced.
- A second universal screening with the DESSA-mini in late fall or early winter will allow you to check in on students, determine if the universal SEL supports are effective, and may be a motivator for educators who are concerned about their students' social-emotional well-being.

If at any time a decision is made to move to all in-person or all virtual instruction, you may access guidance for these two scenarios here: <http://info.apertureed.com/dessa-system-use>.

Thank you for your ongoing efforts to support your students' social and emotional well-being. Please contact our team at clientsuccess@apertureed.com with any questions or concerns.

