# The Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Assessment Buyer's Guide

The criteria to consider as you choose the SEL assessment technology that will support your staff and students now and in the future.

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# Introduction: The ROI of SEL

Social and emotional skills are essential for both children and adults in social interactions and to manage everyday emotional responses. Things like social awareness, setting goals, and taking responsibility for oneself are imperative to maintaining healthy relationships and practicing self-care. These skills have a much broader impact than simply improving personal management and relationships; they're foundational for succeeding both professionally and personally.

Research shows that K-12 students who participate in evidence-based SEL programs:

- Score on average, **13% points higher** academically;
- Have a **6% higher** high school graduation rate; and
- Are **11% more likely** to graduate from college (Taylor et al., 2017).

The relationship between students' social and emotional competence and academic achievement is strong. A 2016 study showed that **students with social and emotional strengths measured by the DESSA were more likely to perform at or above grade level on math and reading tests** (LeBuffe & Robitaille, 2016). Additionally, 75% of students with a social and emotional competence (SEC) need for instruction had basic or below basic reading skills, and 62% of students with an SEC need had basic or below math skills.

**75%** of students with a social and emotional competence (SEC) need for instruction as measured by the DESSA had **basic or below basic reading skills.**

**62%** of students with an SEC need had **basic or below basic math skills.**

(LeBuffe, & Robitaille, 2016)

## SEL Provides Lifelong Benefits

# $11:1

**SEL average return on investment**

(Belfield et al., 2015)

Social and emotional learning is an important predictor of academic success. In a study of students in gifted and talented programs, SEC scores on the DESSA combined with IQ were more accurate in predicting academic success than IQ scores alone  (Kong, 2013).

SEL programs are cost-effective. A positive return on investment of $11 for every $1 dollar was reported by researchers at Columbia University. The benefits reported in this study included decreases in conduct problems and substance abuse, and increases in academic performance, which result in better social and economic outcomes for individuals and communities.

SEL screeners have been shown to predict behaviors as well. Students with a need for SEL instruction on the DESSA-mini were 4.5 times more likely to have a record of serious behavioral

infraction by the end of the school year (Shapiro et al., 2017). But the good news is that social and emotional skills can be taught. Using a strengths-based approach, like the DESSA, can help teachers focus on promoting positive skills and behaviors with their students.

The benefits to SEL are clear. There are multiple variables to consider as you evaluate which program and implementation models will support your goals, but the most important factor is to select evidence-based assessments and programs.

Students identified by the DESSA-mini screener as having a **need for SEL instruction were** # 450% **more likely to have a record of serious behavioral infraction by the end of the school year.**

(Shapiro, Kim, Robitaille, & LeBuffe, 2017)

A cornerstone of your SEL program should be using a quality assessment tool that accurately measures the data you aspire to capture and the milestones you want your students to achieve.

# Social emotional competence is a stronger predictor of academic success than IQ.

# How to Select a High-Quality Assessment

SEL assessment is the foundation of your SEL implementation. By assessing students' strengths and needs, you will be able to make data-driven decisions about how to best support your students' growth and inform continuous quality improvement (CQI) of SEL practices and implementation. However, SEL assessments are not created equally, so it's important to know what to look for so you can select the highest-quality assessment for the students you serve. Criteria to be considered includes:

- CASEL-derived and aligned
- Strength-based
- Evidence-based
- Reliable
- Valid for the intended uses of the assessment
- Examined for bias
- Nationally normed and standardized
- Practical, scalable, and sustainable

Let's explore each of these criteria further.

## CASEL-derived and aligned

The CASEL framework is comprised of five core social and emotional competencies (the CASEL 5) that are well established, and widely adopted by states, districts, schools, and out-of-school time organizations. These interrelated competencies are Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social-Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision-Making. Research has shown that youth and adults benefit from learning and developing these important skills, and it's important to have an assessment that measures these skills.

Aperture Education has developed a data-driven approach to measuring and promoting the CASEL 5 through the DESSA suite of assessments. Aperture's social and emotional framework was based on, derived from, and aligned to the CASEL 5. The DESSA specifically measures and promotes skills within the CASEL framework like setting and achieving goals and a sense of hope, optimism, and positive thinking.

## Strength-based

A strength-based approach to SEL assessment focuses on prevention rather than intervention. Rather than waiting until problem behaviors occur, strength-based measures allow us to identify opportunities for growth proactively. Strength-based approaches also support positive relationships between educators and students, as educators are guided to view their students' strengths rather than focus on their deficits. It also helps students feel connected to school, successful, and engaged in learning.

Starting with strengths helps educators and parents build on what students are already good at while still addressing needs. Parents also appreciate a strength-based approach, which allows them to focus on their child's strengths while working on areas of need at home, resulting in more support and favorable outcomes for the student. It is important to identify and discuss areas of growth in which students would benefit

from additional instruction — rather than to point out deficits. This leaves students, parents, and teachers with a sense of direction, confidence, and optimism.

A strength-based social and emotional assessment will ask educators or parents to rate how frequently they have observed their student(s) demonstrating positive behaviors (e.g., get along with others) rather than maladaptive ones (e.g., annoy others). A focus on strengths can build students' self-efficacy and help them persist when they face difficulties. Observable items include examples such as:

- How often did the child keep trying when unsuccessful?
- How often did the child offer to help somebody?
- How often did the child get things done in a timely fashion?
- How often did the child work well in groups?

In addition to being aligned to the CASEL 5, the DESSA suite of assessments from Aperture Education was informed by resilience theory, which focuses on the positive skills that help people persevere through adversity. The competencies included in the DESSA can serve as protective factors for students. For example, Optimistic Thinking can help students be resilient in the face of setbacks. Similarly, strong Relationship Skills help students feel connected, supported, and able to maintain positive relationships with their peers.

## Evidence-based

Using evidence-based assessment practices will help you make better decisions for the students you serve. Evidence-based assessment practices allow you to: establish your school or district's baseline needs, make good decisions to guide programming decisions; and measure the outcomes of your SEL programming.

Evidence-based assessment practices include using well-designed and thoroughly tested measurement tools. For example, the assessment you select should:

- Include skills and constructs informed by research and theory
- Meet accepted standards for testing, and
- Have evidence to support its intended use.

The assessment tools you select to drive SEL programming decisions should meet the standards for psychological and educational assessments. These standards outline the criteria for test development and use, including evidence of reliability and validity to support the intended uses of the assessments.

An assessment's technical manual should detail the process by which it was developed and should include the results of the psychometric studies undertaken to establish reliability and to provide evidence of its validity. You can also request research summaries or peer-reviewed articles from the test publisher.

**A well-designed assessment includes strong evidence of its reliability and validity for its intended use - so you can have confidence in the data.**
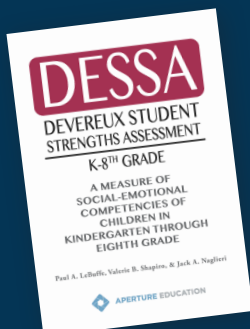
## Reliability

There are several different types of reliability evidence - sometimes described as consistency across items, across forms, across time, and across raters. Internal consistency examines whether the items for each subscale or scale can be considered to measure the same underlying construct. Alternate-forms reliability, usually reported by a correlation coefficient, measures the consistency of scores obtained across different versions of the test. This is important if you're using different forms for screening and progress monitoring. Test-retest reliability looks at the consistency of results when a test is given over a short period of time. And inter-rater reliability looks at the differences in scores when different people serve as raters (e.g. parents or educators).

## Validity

The SEL assessment tool should have evidence of validity to support the intended uses of the measure. Validity refers to the evidence supporting the interpretations of scores and how that information is used. Just like we wouldn't use a math quiz to inform whether a student needs additional practice in reading, we shouldn't use an SEL assessment for purposes outside of those examined and supported by research. There are many different types of validity evidence – for example, content validity (focused on what the tool measures), criterion-related validity (focused on how well scores predict performance on an outcome or criterion measure), construct validity (focused on how well the tool measures the theoretical construct of interest, e.g., social and emotional competence), to name just a few.

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**DESSA**
DEVEREUX STUDENT
STRENGTHS ASSESSMENT
K-8TH GRADE

A MEASURE OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES OF CHILDREN IN KINDERGARTEN THROUGH EIGHTH GRADE

Paul A. LeBuffe, Valerie B. Shapiro, & Jack A. Naglieri

APERTURE EDUCATION

**The DESSA by Aperture Education includes strong evidence of its reliability and validity for use within a data-driven SEL program. Learn more by downloading the DESSA Manual.**

**DOWNLOAD THE DESSA MANUAL**

## Examined for Bias

SEL assessments can be used to observe and describe students' behavior to inform our decisions. The goal is to assess a student's social and emotional competence as accurately as possible - but no measure is perfect. There is always some error that influences student scores. But assessment bias is error that systematically affects the scores of a particular group of students.

The assessment tools you choose should include information on how bias has been examined. For example, were substantial differences found among different groups of students based on race, gender or ethnicity? An assessment's technical manual should explain the efforts made to reduce and minimize bias so you can use the tool with confidence.

## Nationally-Normed

An important consideration for assessments of social emotional competence is the use of national norms, not local norms. National norms are based on large samples of students that represent the larger K-12 student population, whereas local norms are based only on the students in that region. Local norms can have an adverse impact on equity. For example, in a lower-achieving district, local norms will results in students being under-identified for instructional support. In higher achieving districts, local norms will result in over-identifying students, leading to a poor use of resources and time.

National norms are based on inclusive, diverse and representative samples. This is important because ultimately, we want students to develop social and emotional skills that will help them be successful everywhere.

# Screening, Assessment, and Progress Monitoring

Just like in academics, screening, assessment, and progress monitoring are necessary to help educators, counselors, and administrators. Each of these serves a different purpose. SEL screeners quickly and effectively identify which students might benefit from further assessment of their SEC. An SEL assessment is an opportunity to dig deeper to better understand a student's specific strengths and needs. Progress monitoring tools help to measure change over time. Data from these measures of social and emotional competence can help to:

- Gain a baseline understanding of students' existing social and emotional skills
- Understand specific areas of strength and growth
- Make decisions about supports for individual students, classrooms, grades, schools, and districts with confidence
- Monitor student progress over time
- Evaluate the impact of an SEL program to make adjustments over time for continuous quality improvement (CQI)

## Aperture Decision Making Process

**Strong Data**
DESSA-Mini/Full DESSA

↓

**Intentional Decisions**
Foundational Practices Growth Strategies SEL Curriculum

↓

**Proactive Prevention & Intervention**

↓

**Ongoing Progress Monitoring**

↓

**Successful Outcomes**

↓
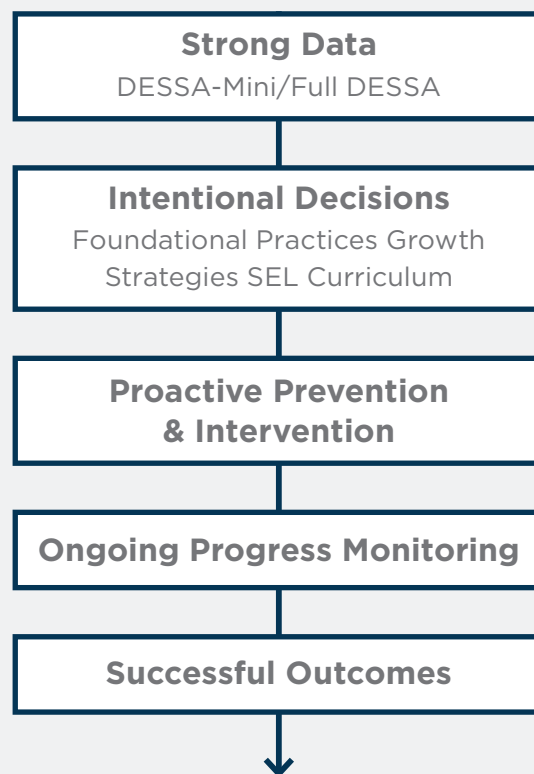
But not all SEL screeners, assessments, and progress monitoring tools are alike. When evaluating options, consider the following.

## SEL Screening

SEL screening will help you and your staff identify students' overall social and emotional competence in a universal setting, such as an entire school or district.

The World Health Organization recommends that SEL screeners meet technical standards for reliability, validity, statistical bias, representative sample, and classification accuracy and cautions against using screening data that put students into tiers due to perceived deficits. Instead, screening results should be used to identify students who would benefit from further assessment of their SEC. Furthermore, CASEL has recommended that SEL screeners be strength-based.

A strength-based screener can help a school understand how well its universal SEL program is working. It can also proactively identify students who need additional support to develop SEC. It may also be a great tool for CQI and progress monitoring and supporting the understanding and development of competencies in the adults administering the tool, according to a joint report from The Council of Chief State School Officers, CASEL, and the American Institute for Research.

# What about surveys?

Surveys can be helpful tools in gathering information about culture and climate through student and educator attitudes or perceptions on a variety of data points, but they may be limited in both their ability to identify specific strengths and/or areas of need for instruction for individuals. They also lack standardization and are not an appropriate tool to document progress as students learn social and emotional skills throughout the year. Instead, applying a Multi-Tiered System of Support framework with aligned evidence-based assessment enables you to collect SEL data throughout the year, determine whether statistically meaningful change has occurred, and use this information to modify teaching strategies, redirect your teaching focus, and help students achieve higher rates of success in specific and measurable skill development.

Another essential element to consider as you evaluate screening tools is the time it will take to administer. Screening should be universal, so it's important to find a tool that is practical for educators to administer. For example, the DESSA-mini only takes one minute per student!

## Assessment

A strength-based SEL assessment can provide a more in-depth look at each student's specific strengths and needs. This gives educators an opportunity to leverage student strengths as they work on areas of need. For example, a student with strong relationship skills but a need in goal-directed behavior might have a peer-mentor or group that helps them set and achieve positive goals.

Some organizations screen all their students with the DESSA-mini, then administer the DESSA for only those who show a need. Some choose to administer the DESSA for all students. Assessments will naturally take more time than a screener. The DESSA assessment typically takes 5-8 minutes per student for an educator to complete.

Student-facing assessments are another way to connect with students and help them build a sense of agency, especially older students. To fulfill that goal, it's important to deliver prompt feedback on assessment results to students. The DESSA-Student Self-Report for students in grades 9-12 takes less than seven minutes for most students to complete and deliver real-time feedback through a gamified, mobile-friendly software platform.

## Progress Monitoring

Progress monitoring is a vital part of understanding if and how social and emotional intervention is having an impact throughout the course of your program. Like screening, progress monitoring should take minimal time for it to be a practical part of an educator's schedule.

A unique feature of the DESSA-mini is that it comes with four different forms with different combinations of eight questions each, specifically to be used for progress monitoring throughout the year.

**Read more about the importance of strength-based screening and assessment in the white paper, To Both Promote and Prevent: The Importance and Practicality of Strength-based Screening, produced by Aperture Education in partnership with the Center for Health and Healthcare in Schools in the Milken Institute of Public Health at George Washington University.**

**DOWNLOAD WHITEPAPER**

# Data & Reporting

Once assessments are completed, data analysis and action begin. It's important that the system you choose features functionality that makes this easy and fast, so you and your staff can focus on supporting students versus getting stuck in spreadsheets. Reporting criteria to consider include:

- Action-oriented information
- Real-time interactive reporting
- Longitudinal/comparison reporting
- Multiple reporting levels
- Data exports
- User roles

### Action-oriented information

It's important that the assessment you choose gives you data you can act on, meaning it gives you a clear understanding of where an individual or group of students stand in their social and emotional competence, and clarity on what you and your staff can do in response to the data. For example, if an educator rates a student with the DESSA and that student falls into the "need for instruction" range for Social-Awareness, an educator can dive into each item pertaining to Social-Awareness to understand the specific skill or skills a student should be taught, and then access strategies to support that skill.

### Real-time interactive reporting

Real-time interactive reporting means you have instant access to your social and emotional data. Interactive reporting (i.e., data visualization or a data dashboard) provides immediate, actionable insights and supports data exploration and hypothesis testing through filtering and sorting of data at various levels of aggregation ranging from the individual student to the entire district. Users should be able to easily filter and sort by a variety of student demographic variables including gender, race, FRPL eligibility, English language learner (ELL), or special education status for an in-depth analysis.

## Data exports

PDF reports that provide a consistent data display format and terminology can be helpful tools in understanding assessment results and are ideal for team meetings or sharing results with parents and students. In addition to interactive and standard reporting, data exports should allow users to export CSV files at the school, district, or state level (depending on user role) to further explore the data.

## User roles

Putting the appropriate data at the forefront for your different users will help them perform their work easier and faster. For example, an educator who is rating students in their classroom should be able to quickly access their class rating list and reporting. A district or program administrator, on the other hand, will want to be able to quickly dive into program-wide reporting such as rating progress and real-time, aggregate rating results.

## Longitudinal/comparison reporting

Longitudinal and comparison reporting facilitates a data-driven, CQI focused approach to SEL. An SEL assessment system should feature data analytic and interpretation techniques to improve outcomes and maximize your district's return on investment. The system should also be able to analyze whether any changes are statistically significant and should include both individual student and aggregate pre-post and progress monitoring data across classrooms, grades, schools, and the broader district/organization.

## Reporting levels

The appropriate data should be available to all system users when they need it. Consider a tool that offers reporting by individuals, classroom, grade-level, school/site, district/program, and even at the state level.

> **It's important that the assessment you choose gives you data you can act on, meaning it gives you a clear understanding of where an individual or group of students stand in their social and emotional competence, and clarity on what you and your staff can do in response to the data.**

# SEL Intervention

SEL assessment results can be used to not only understand the unique social and emotional strengths and needs of students, but to differentiate instruction within an MTSS framework or tiered support system. Once you have reviewed your data, you will put together an action plan on how to support students individually, in groups, classrooms, or even across an entire district.

## SEL curriculum

If you have an existing SEL program or curriculum, find an assessment that aligns with your program. Common programs include Second Step, Ruler, Sanford Harmony, Kickboard, and Move This World. Aperture Education offers a growing library of Crosswalks for SEL programs, which outline how the DESSA assessment aligns with the curriculum. If you don't have a curriculum, an SEL assessment can provide you and your staff with a baseline understanding of your students' skills before choosing a curriculum.

**Make sure your SEL assessment is aligned with your curriculum. Common research-based options include:**
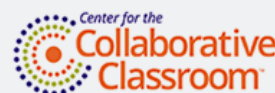
## Strategies

Strategies are helpful tools for educators that can be used on their own or can supplement and extend an SEL curriculum. Strategies can be provided at the universal, small-group, and individual student level. They are often written as lesson plans at the primary, intermediate elementary, middle school, and high school levels.

Aperture provides a robust library of strategies for students that are aligned to the social and emotional competencies assessed through the DESSA, in addition to take-home strategies to promote parent engagement, and teacher reflection and action strategies to deepen the teacher's understanding of SEL principles and practices. Aperture also offers foundational practices, a series of classroom routines that establish the culture and climate for effective SEL. These foundational practices are not aligned to a specific competency. Examples include greeting rituals to begin the day, optimistic closure to end the day, the use of movement, promoting student voice, academic integration, and trauma-informed practices.

## Instructional planning

Assessment is a crucial component of a continuous improvement plan that can help you develop instruction. The secret to creating an effective continuous improvement plan is to assess, evaluate, act, and repeat. Capturing and analyzing data throughout the year helps you determine whether students are making

sufficient progress. The data also provides valuable insight into how to make changes to the program.

For example, the data might show most students need additional support in a specific social and emotional competency. You can use that information to change universal instruction to increase focus on that skill. SEL data can also show you what is working and what is not working so you can adjust your program to improve effectiveness.

SEL data can also help you direct additional help to English learners (ELs). SEL provides important ways to help ELs feel a sense of belonging, cope with stress, overcome difficulties with classmates, stay on task, cope with feelings of loneliness, and reduce anxiety.

> **SEL data can show you what is working and what is not working so you can adjust your program to improve effectiveness.**

# Professional Development, Training, and Support

Once you've selected your SEL assessment system, you and your team will need training, professional development, and ongoing support. Your SEL assessment provider should be a strong partner, to ensure the success of your implementation efforts. Here are a few key things to look for as you consider SEL assessment providers:

- Thorough yet practical professional development for all roles within your district, school, or organizational staff
- Professional development aligned to the implementation science and best practices outlined in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
- A dedicated success team to guide you through the process of onboarding and continued use of the SEL assessments
- 24/7/365 responsive support

## Thorough professional development

Professional development should be provided at both the school leadership and educator level to drive improved social and emotional outcomes for students in the short and long term as outlined in CASEL SEL Impact research. Effective professional development meets your staff where they are, and provides just in time support for effective implementation.

> **Your SEL assessment provider should be a partner in your implementation efforts.**

## Purpose of Professional Learning

| Build capacity of leaders | | Gain visibility into social and emotional competence |
|---|---|---|
| | Prepare educators for SEL assessment implementation | |
| Utilize data to determine supports | | Support equitable learning outcomes |
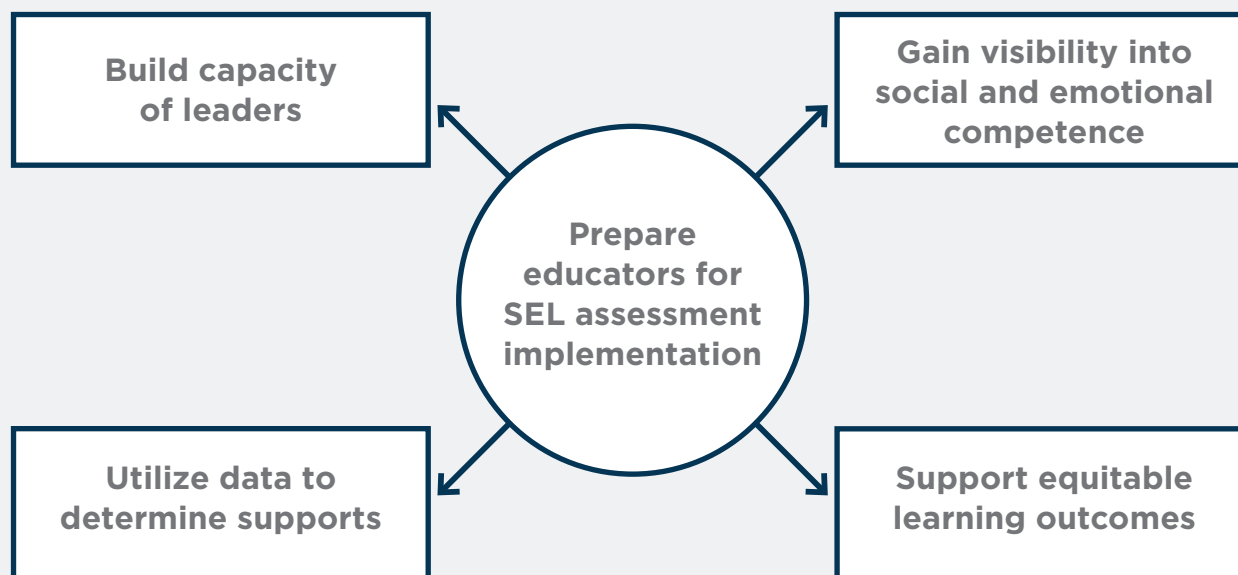
Professional development should be aligned to a respected and research-based model such as the KASAB (Killion, 2008) model. This will incorporate knowledge, attitude, skill, aspiration, and behavior components into each professional development offering.

- The knowledge component should include a conceptual understanding of SEL, the assessments and online system, and the theories, principles, and research underlying the development and use of the SEL assessment.
- The attitude component should include supporting educators in the belief that students' social and emotional competence is a vital part of their education and that by assessing and providing instruction to those identified with a need, student outcomes can be improved.
- The skill component should help educators learn how to assess social and emotional competence, monitor progress, and use strategies to support students who have a need as well as implement multiple tiers of SEL including universal, small group, and individual instruction.

- The aspiration component should focus on encouraging educators to aspire to increase social and emotional competence for students to support increased academic and life success.
- The behavior component should support educators in the consistent application of their skills to use the program to help students improve their social and emotional competence and long-term outcomes.

Another important consideration for you and your team is staff time. Training programs should be thorough and teach educators all they need to know to successfully complete the assessment and operate the software, but they should also be considerate of educators' time and busy schedules.

### Alignment with ESSA

Professional development for educators should also be aligned with ESSA standards from the U.S. Department of Education, including being "sustained (not stand-alone, one-day, or short-term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused..." (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

## Adherence to implementation science

Research shows that implementation of any educational program or initiative is a multi-step process, and that quality implementation intended to achieve outcomes can be expected to take 2-5 years. If well-defined or well-constructed programs are not in place, the timeline for achieving outcomes increases (National Implementation Research Network, 2013-2019). When it comes to SEL, research comparing youth who had participated in better implemented school-based social and emotional learning programs with those involved in less well-implemented programs showed that those who participated in the former group demonstrated academic gains that were twice as large as students in the latter group; they also showed reductions in conduct problems that were nearly twice as large, and reductions in emotional distress (i.e., depression and anxiety) that were more than twice as large as students in the latter group. (Durlak et al., 2011)

When looking for an assessment provider, seek out a partner who will help you and your team develop a practical and research-based plan for implementation.

# Educator social and emotional learning

Knowledgeable educators are key for successful SEL implementation. Supporting the social and emotional knowledge, skill set, and well-being of your K-12 educators and staff is vital for them and for their students and should be part of your overall SEL program. Educators who are well-trained in SEL are better prepared to teach social and emotional skills, can model social and emotional skills to their students, and can build their own resilience. Educator SEL professional development can also prevent educator turnover and improve educator job satisfaction.

Aperture Education provides districts and afterschool programs with professional development tools, self-reflective assessment, personal development plans, self-directed strategies, and teaching practices through the Educator Social and Emotional Reflection and Training (EdSERT) program.

**LEARN MORE**

> **Research shows that implementation of any educational program or initiative is a multi-step process, and that quality implementation intended to achieve outcomes can be expected to take 2-5 years.**

# Technical Considerations

## Data privacy

Student data privacy and security is one of the most important aspects of any education software and should be a priority for you and your staff as well as your chosen provider. Assessment technology providers should be FERPA compliant, COPPA compliant if the provider has a student-facing component, and subjected to regular, intensive third-party security penetration testing. Provider employees should complete annual data privacy and security training and have a federal background check on file. In addition, the provider should be a signatory to the Student Privacy Pledge. Lastly, the provider should regularly review changes to state education data privacy laws and adjust its privacy and data security policies accordingly.

## Accessibility

Assessment technologies should be easily accessible to you, your staff, and your students and should be compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2 (WCAG 2). For more information and a list of accessibility measures, visit www.w3.org.

## Ease-of-use

In addition to accessibility, the assessment technology should follow user experience best practices. The provider software should be easy for you and your staff to navigate and provide you with the information you are seeking when and where you expect it to be. A good user experience with the tools from your chosen provider will ensure that your staff will be able to perform their duties on the platform with more efficiency and that you will get the most out of your investment.

## Scalability

Your assessment technology should be able to scale easily with the size of your program. For larger districts or broader organizational initiatives, that means being able to endure substantive load tests with high throughput and low error rates. It's reasonable to ask the assessment company to provide results of a recent load test. You can also ask about the size of districts that have been supported by the provider in the past.

# Funding SEL Assessment Technology

Whether you are just beginning an SEL pilot or small-scale implementation, or if you are providing SEL assessments and curriculum across your entire district, you will need to map out a budget to support your plan. A great resource to guide you through this process is the [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning's (CASEL) "Roadmap to Financial Sustainability."](#) Included are actual site SEL budgets, handy budget calculators, and case studies about a variety of districts' SEL implementations. Review these models and use them to help craft an SEL program that will work for your district and resources.

As you work on your SEL program budgeting, keep in mind that SEL assessment data can help you understand the needs of your students and staff, so you know where to allocate funds for additional resources. SEL data can also help you know which supports will maximize your budget. Student data can tell you which students — and how many students — need more intensive interventions or additional resources, and it provides insight into why students are struggling. Use this information to concentrate on which supports (i.e., staffing and instructional and intervention programs) are most needed and will have the greatest impact. Educator data can help guide budget decisions around staff support, including professional learning.

There is an incredible amount of funding available for SEL programs to include assessment at the federal and state levels. Grant funding is also a great option.

## Federal funding

The 2020 CARES Act provided $13.2 billion to elementary and secondary schools and districts to address COVID-19's impact. The American Rescue Plan (ARP) includes the following:

- $123 billion for K–12 state education agencies. Of these funds, $800 million is earmarked for children experiencing homelessness and those hardest hit by the pandemic.
- $2.75 billion is available to governors to assist private schools.
- $3 billion is allocated for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The good news for SEL is that at least 20% of district funds must be used to address learning loss through evidence-based interventions that support students' academic and SEL needs. As your team applies for funds, keep in mind several key funding expenditure areas within ARP ESSER and CARES that are applicable to SEL:

- Evidence-based SEL programs
- SEL programs that support educators' health and well-being
- Professional learning
- SEL assessments
- Summer, afterschool, and other extended learning and enrichment programs
- Staff retention (including counselors, social workers, etc.)
- Mental health services

## Other funding options

Your state may have funding set aside to support SEL programs, and grants are an option, too. A great website for searching for grants is www.grantsalert.com.

## Tips for Securing SEL Funding

Below are some general tips that will help your school or district find and attain SEL funds. Consider these guiding questions:

1. How can you use federal and state funds most effectively?

2. What data, evidence, and protocols are needed to justify specific funding areas?

3. How will you coordinate efforts and adopt the most coherent approach across many funding streams, including ARP ESSER and CARES Act funds?

# Conclusion

Quality SEL assessment is the cornerstone of a successful SEL implementation. We hope this guide was helpful in outlining the essential criteria to consider as you choose your SEL assessment, and that you feel more confident in your journey toward finding a quality assessment technology tool to support you, your staff, and your students now and in the future.

**If you are interested in learning more about SEL assessment technology from Aperture Education, contact our team today.**

*Use the matrix on the following pages to continue guiding you as you review your assessment criteria and options.*

# Quick Start Guide to SEL Assessment Technology Evaluation: Quality Comparison Matrix

This printable matrix is designed to help you and your team compare assessment technologies based upon important criteria you should be considering in your decision-making process.

| | Quality Indicator | Aperture Education (The DESSA) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Relevance and Program Alignment** | CASEL-aligned | X | | |
| | Strength-based % | **100%** | | |
| | K-12 | X | | |
| | Academic Success | X | | |
| | MTSS/RtI/PBIS | X | | |
| | College and Career Readiness | X | | |
| | Gifted and Talented | X | | |
| | Mental Health | X | | |
| | School Climate and Culture | X | | |
| | Curriculum Aligned (Second Step, RULER, Sanford Harmony, PATHS, etc.) | X | | |
| | Strategies included | X | | |
| **Evidence-based assessment** | Sensitivity and Specificity Data Available | X | | |
| | Established Reliability | X | | |
| | Validity Evidence | X | | |
| | Examined for fairness and bias | X | | |
| | Appropriate norms | X | | |
| | Peer-Reviewed Research | **130+** | | |

| | Quality Indicator | Aperture Education (The DESSA) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Screening, Assessment, and Progress Monitoring** | Meets standards set forth by CASEL, The Council of Chief State School Officers, and American Institutes for Research | X | | |
| | Universal screener that meets criteria set forth by the World Health Organization | X | | |
| | Diagnostic assessment available | X | | |
| | Alternate forms available for progress monitoring | X | | |
| | Appropriate Informants (Educator, Parent, Out-of-School Time Staff, Student) | X | | |
| | Appropriate Uses (Formative, Summative, Evaluative, CQI) | X | | |
| | Time to administer screener | **1 minute** | | |
| | Time to administer assessment | **5-8 minutes** | | |
| **Data & Reporting Functionality** | Real-time interactive reporting | X | | |
| | Data Exports | X | | |
| | User Types | X | | |
| | Reporting: Individual Item Analysis | X | | |
| | Reporting: Classroom | X | | |
| | Reporting: School/Site | X | | |
| | Reporting: District/Program | X | | |
| | Reporting: State/Organization | X | | |
| | Reporting: Longitudinal/Comparison | X | | |
| | Action-oriented information | X | | |
| **Training, Professional Development, and Support** | Implementation Support | X | | |
| | ESSA Aligned Professional Development | X | | |
| | Educator SEL Professional Development | X | | |
| | 24/7/365 Support | X | | |
| **Technical Considerations** | Data Privacy (FERPA, COPPA) | X | | |
| | Accessibility/WCAG compliant | X | | |
| | Ease of Use | X | | |
| | Scalability | X | | |

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**APERTURE EDUCATION**

Aperture Education empowers over 3,000 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. Aperture enables education leaders to make strategic, data-based decisions about SEL within their organizations. Aperture includes the DESSA suite of strength-based assessments, CASEL-informed intervention strategies, and robust reporting, all in one easy-to-use digital platform. Aperture has supported over one million students in their social and emotional growth and continues to develop strength-based, innovative solutions to bring the whole child into focus. To learn more, visit www.ApertureEd.com.