



### The Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA)

The DESSA is a 72-item, standardized, norm-referenced behavior rating scale that assesses 8 social and emotional competencies that serve as protective factors for children. The DESSA is completed by teachers, parents and OST staff for students in K-8 grades. The DESSA is designed so that every item reflects an observable behavior (a social and emotional skill) and allows raters to reflect on a variety of competencies demonstrated by children in the environment where they observe and interact with the child.

The DESSA provides 9 scores, including scores on the 8 social and emotional scale domains, as well as an overall total score referred to as the Social-Emotional Composite (SEC) Score. Scores are provided as *Tscores* and percentile ranges, with high scores indicating *strengths*, low scores indicating a *need for instruction*, and scores falling in the middle as *typical* scores. It can be used formatively to differentiate instruction of universal curricula, or to select Growth Strategies for students needing additional supports. The DESSA is highly sensitive to change, making it a very effective measure of skill acquisition across the 8 social and emotional competencies.

### The DESSA-mini

The DESSA-mini was designed to provide a sound, brief, strength-based measure of social and emotional competence in children that is sensitive to change. It is a standardized, nationally normed, screener and progress monitor of social and emotional competence in children in grades K-8. The DESSA-mini is completed by teachers, OST professionals, or parents and yields one score, the Social and Emotional Total (SET) score. High SET scores indicate that the child being rated is demonstrating a *strength* in overall social and emotional competence. Approximately 16% of students score in the *strength* range. Most students (about 68%) will receive a rating in the *typical* range. Those receiving a low SET score (about 16%) are described as demonstrating a *need for instruction*.

Used as a universal screener and progress monitoring tool, the DESSA-mini includes 8 items and takes only 1 minute per student to complete, allowing a teacher or program to screen his/her entire classroom/program in one planning period. Despite its length, the DESSA-mini is a well-developed tool that meets or exceeds professional standards for a high-quality screener<sup>1</sup>. It is often used to screen an entire school district as a part of a multi-tiered system of supports, allowing the focus to be on those students who show a *need for instruction*.

Finally, the DESSA-mini is an ideal tool to use as a pre/post measurement of social and emotional competence acquisition as a means for program evaluation and outcomes measurement.

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<sup>1</sup> Shapiro, V.B., Kim B.K.E., Robitaille, J.L. & LeBuffe, P.A. Protective factor screening for prevention practice: Sensitivity and specificity of the DESSA-mini. *School Psychology Quarterly*. Advance online publication