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Administering the DESSA Full Diagnostic on Branching Minds

Instructions for using the DESSA and reviewing student scores



Written by Essie Sutton

Updated over a week ago

*This article contains information on the **DESSA full diagnostic assessment**. Guidelines on how to use the **DESSA Mini screener** can be found [here](#).*

Background

The DESSA is a strengths-based assessment that measures multiple domains of student social-emotional well-being. It is typically completed for students who are identified as having a **need for SEL instruction** from the results of the DESSA Mini Screener, but some schools complete the DESSA for additional or all students. The assessment available through Branching Minds is teacher-facing and includes two versions: one for students in kindergarten through 8th grade and another for students in 9th through 12th grade. The K-8 version is 72 questions per student and the High School version is 43 questions per student.

The purpose of the DESSA is to identify the specific social-emotional competencies that require additional support as well as students' social-emotional strengths. The results can be used to create social-emotional intervention groups made up of students who are in need of support in similar skill areas. This can also help teachers develop more targeted goals and intervention plans for behavior and social-emotional learning as well as academics. When administered 2-3 times across the school year, the results can be used to track student progress across each social-emotional area over time.

The DESSA has extensive research evidence to support its use as a social-emotional

assessment. The questions in the assessment were developed and selected based on studies with nationally representative groups of students. The results from the DESSA are highly correlated with the DESSA Mini as well as other indicators of social-emotional competence and well-being (More research findings on the DESSA can be found [here](#)).

The DESSA measures the following 8 areas of social-emotional competence:

- 1) Self Management
- 2) Goal-Directed Behavior
- 3) Responsible Decision-Making
- 4) Personal Responsibility
- 5) Relationship Skills
- 6) Social Awareness
- 7) Self Awareness
- 8) Optimistic Thinking

Guidelines for Administration

Please review the guidelines below before administering the DESSA.

Training for DESSA

It is strongly recommended that all teachers who will be completing the DESSA receive the appropriate training. Teachers will be invited to join a one hour virtual workshop, where they will learn more about the DESSA Mini and DESSA full and how to use it effectively. If you are unable to attend your school's training session, please connect with your school principal or MTSS leadership team to figure out an alternative training plan.

Who Should Complete the DESSA?

If your district is using the DESSA through the Branching Minds platform it should only be completed by classroom teachers. School counselors, social workers, and other specialists should not complete the DESSA. If students have more than one classroom teacher, it should be completed by the teacher who spends the most amount of time with the student. If students spend an equal amount of time with multiple teachers (e.g., at the middle and high school level) school and district leaders can decide which teachers will be responsible for completing the DESSA for groups of students. **Only one teacher should complete an assessment for each student and teachers should complete the assessment independently and not with other teachers.**

When Should the DESSA be Completed?

Classroom teachers should wait until they have spent at least four weeks with their students before completing the DESSA. This includes returning from the winter break; after this break teachers should again wait four weeks before completing the DESSA for their students. If a new

student joins a teacher's class, they should again wait until they have had that student for at least four weeks before completing the DESSA for that specific student.

The DESSA full is typically completed after the DESSA Mini screener has been administered. The results from the screener will help teachers determine which students require the full DESSA. It is recommended that teachers complete the DESSA for students who are identified, from the Mini screener, as having a need for SEL instruction. However, the DESSA full can still be completed by

additional or all students. For example, if a student scores in the low end of the typical range for the DESSA Mini, a teacher may decide to complete the full DESSA diagnostic for that student.

There are three possible administration windows for the DESSA: Fall, Winter, and Spring. District and school leadership teams should decide when your DESSA diagnostics should be completed and the corresponding window. This should then be communicated to all teachers completing the DESSA full.

Completing the DESSA Full Diagnostic on Branching Minds

Step 1: From the **Students** page select students you would like to complete the DESSA full for. If needed, use the filters at the top to narrow down the list of students, for example based on grade and/or tier level.

The screenshot shows the 'Students' page in the Branching Minds interface. At the top, it says 'Tyra Howe: Students' and 'Showing 4 students'. There are filters for 'Staff: Tyra Howe' and 'Grade: 8'. A search bar is available. Below the filters, there are four students listed with their DESSA scores across various subjects. The scores are represented by colored triangles with numbers inside.

Student	Reading	Math	Behavior	Writing	Speech	Science	Social Studies
Misty Abbott (MA)	2	3	2	1	1	1	2
Elza Abshire (EA)	2	1	3	1	2	2	1
Lorena Collins (LC)	2	-	1	-	-	-	-
Laisha Conn (LC)	1	-	1	-	-	-	-

Step 2: Go to the **Actions** Menu and select **Administer DESSA Assessment**

Staff: Tyra Howe x Grade: 8 x

✓ Select All Deselect All Actions ▾ My Students 4 Selected

✓	MA	Misty Abbott 983204 8th Grade Dragonstone Middle School	2	3	✓ Reading	✓ Math
✓	EA	Elza Abshire 993133 8th Grade Branching Minds Middle School	2	1	! Reading	Math
✓	LC	Lorena Collins 991811 8th Grade Branching Minds Middle School	2	-	✓ Reading	Math
✓	LC	Laisha Conn 40502 8th Grade (19 yrs) Branching Minds Middle School	1	-	✓ Reading	Math

Step 3: Select the **Assessment Window** from the drop down menu.

TH

Tyra Howe

DESSA Assessment Administration

To administer this assessment, you must first choose the appropriate screening window.

Assessment Window

Fall 2022

Fall 2022

Winter 2022

Spring 2022

Assessment

Select...

Step 4: Under **Assessment**, select **DESSA Diagnostic**.

TH

Tyra Howe

DESSA Assessment Administration

To administer this assessment, you must first choose the appropriate screening window.

Assessment Window

Fall 2022

4 students

Assessment

DESSA Diagnostic

DESSA Diagnostic

DESSA Mini/Screener

Step 5: Select the **Start** button next to each student's name to begin their DESSA assessment. Remember that this is a teacher-facing assessment and students do not have any interaction with the platform and do not need to be present for the assessment. Teachers can also search for students and add them to the list using the search box.

DESSA Assessment AdministrationSY 2022

To administer this assessment, you must first choose the appropriate screening window.

Assessment Window

Fall 2022

Assessment

DESSA Diagnostic

4 students

Q Add a student

Student Name	Student ID	Completed On	Completed By
Misty Abbott	983204		<div>Start</div>
Elza Abshire	993133		<div>Start</div>
Lorena Collins	991811		<div>Start</div>
Laisha Conn	40502		<div>Start</div>

Step 6: Answer all of the questions for one student at a time. The progress bar on the top right corner of the screen will indicate how many questions have been answered. Once you are finished, select **Submit** at the bottom of the page.

MA Misty Abbott
983204 | 8th Grade (19 yrs old)

DESSA Diagnostic K-8 : Fall 2021 - 2022
4/72

During the past 4 weeks, how often did the student...

1. Remember important information?

NeverRarelyOccasionallyOftenVery Often

2. Carry herself/himself with confidence?

NeverRarelyOccasionallyOftenVery Often

3. Keep trying when unsuccessful?

NeverRarelyOccasionallyOftenVery Often

4. Handle his/her belongings with care?

NeverRarelyOccasionallyOftenVery Often

Step 7: Once you submit an assessment for a student, you will be taken back to your list of students. Continue working through the list. After each one is completed, the **Completed On** date will appear as well as who the screener was **Completed By**.

TH Tyra Howe

DESSA Assessment Administration

SY 2022

To administer this assessment, you must first choose the appropriate screening window.

Assessment Window

Fall 2022

Assessment

DESSA Diagnostic

4 students

+

Add a student

Student Name	Student ID	Completed On	Completed By
Misty Abbott	21919	07/30/21	Shampa Afroz
Elza Abshire	21668		<div>Start</div>
Lorena Collins	20206		<div>Start</div>
Laisha Conn	22367		<div>Start</div>

Reviewing Student Results

Students' scores on the DESSA can be viewed under **Benchmarks & Universal Screeners** on the student's **Overview Page**.

MA Misty Abbott

21919 | 9th Grade (23 yrs old)

Intervention Report

Log Behavior Incident

Benchmarks

Meetings

Family Communication

Services

Supporting Docs

DESSA

Jul 26, 2021

Social-emotional Composite

Score: 43

Percentile: 24

Level: Typical

Jun 14, 2021

Social-emotional Composite

Score: 47

Percentile: 38

Level: Typical

Measure	Score	Percentile	Level
Decision Making	44	27	Typical
Goal-Directed Behavior	41	18	Typical
Optimistic Thinking	51	54	Typical
Personal Responsibility	35	7	Need
Relationship Skills	49	46	Typical

Self-Awareness	51	54	Typical
Self-Management	41	18	Typical
Social Awareness	35	7	Need

Students will receive an overall score, percentile, and level on the DESSA diagnostics, as well as a score, percentile, and level for each skill area. The **Score** is a standardized T-score that has a set mean of 50 and standard deviation of 10. T-scores have equal units along the scale, ensuring that the scores have the same meaning across the range. This makes it possible to compare across students and assessment windows. The **Percentile** describes the student's relative score on the DESSA skill areas compared to other students who have been assessed. The student's **Level** is determined based on cut points for the T-score. T- Scores of 60 and above indicate that the child has “**strengths**” in a given skill area, T-scores of 41-59 inclusive indicate that the child is showing a “**typical**” amount of positive behaviors related to the given skill area, and T-scores of 40 and below indicate that the child has a “**need for instruction**” to further develop the given social-emotional skill as compared to the national standardization sample.

Did this answer your question?

