

DESSA-Mini Accuracy & Practicality

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- Schools need **accurate** and **practical** assessment tools that can screen a student population for predictors of mental, emotional, or behavioral problems and facilitate decision making regarding the level of social-emotional instruction that an individual student needs.

Accuracy

- A screener's accuracy is essential: screeners need to be able to correctly identify students who are truly in need of support. If a screener overidentifies students, schools may waste precious resources conducting follow-up assessment and unnecessary intervention. If a screener under-identifies students, schools will miss an opportunity to support students truly needing additional instruction.
- A 2014 review by Jenkins and colleagues found that only one screener, the Behavioral and Emotional Screening System (BESS; Kamphaus & Reynolds, 2007), met criteria put forth by Glascoe (2005) related to screening accuracy. The BESS includes both problem behaviors and strengths, includes approximately 25-30 items, and takes roughly 5 minutes to complete.
- The DESSA-Mini has recently been found to not just meet, but to exceed Glascoe's standards. Specifically, when comparing the accuracy of the DESSA-Mini to the full DESSA, classification agreement – the percent of time the DESSA-Mini and the full DESSA reach the same determination of Need for Instruction - is high (87-94%). These rates exceed standards in the field.
- The predictive validity of the DESSA-Mini was also found to be reliable. Students screened as having a Need for Instruction at the beginning of the year were 4.5 times more likely to have a record of serious disciplinary infraction at the end of the school year compared with those students who were not identified as being in the Need for Instruction range.

Practicality

- A screener also needs to be practical – it should not be too time consuming or expensive, and should not stigmatize students.
 - The DESSA-Mini is only 8-items in length, and takes one minute per student to complete.
 - The DESSA-Mini is also strength-based, focusing on positive behaviors of students, providing less opportunity for stigmatizing students with problem behaviors.
- Findings from this paper indicate that the DESSA-Mini is both an accurate and practical tool for screening populations of students for social-emotional competence. The DESSA-Mini is one of very few screeners that meet or exceed professional screening standards, while also providing the important benefits of being brief and strength-based.

References

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