



## **Connecticut is Working to Strengthening Student Social and Emotional Skills**

All students deserve high-quality, engaging, and comprehensive instruction that addresses their social, emotional, and academic needs in a safe and supportive environment. The list of beneficial outcomes from implementing social-emotional learning (SEL) is extensive and well researched. Students experience improved academic performance and postsecondary success, healthy social relationships, improved decision-making and problem-solving skills, and a better understanding of self. The process by which students learn these and other similar skills are called SEL. Relationships between the school staff and families are enhanced. Administrators and other school faculty benefit from a safer and more positive school climate that is conducive to a healthy learning environment.

These are unprecedented times, and it is hard to gauge the emotional impact on students. Prioritizing support for students' social-emotional and behavioral needs is vital for returning to school. Some students will have experienced grief and loss, sickness, and intensified challenges. Developing a trusting relationship between families, students, and educators is essential to improving students' emotional wellness.

Over two decades of research has helped us understand the critical role social-emotional skills play in each student's success in and outside of school and life. Skills such as making good decisions, persisting at challenging tasks, demonstrating self-control, and working well in groups are necessary to succeed as students and adults.

SEL integration is a vital component in K-12 education and contributes to the whole-child success across the life span. Connecticut public schools have amplified their attention to SEL work for students and adults while fostering a positive school ethos to support our students in developing these essential skills to reach their fullest potential and flourish and thrive. The Connecticut State Department of Education obtained a nationally recognized SEL assessment system that districts can choose to use at no cost. As part of this process, our teachers will be utilizing a strength-based tool called the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA), a social-emotional screening and assessment tool. Using this universal screening tool, teachers will assess to what degree each student has demonstrated specific social-emotional skills. Most importantly, it should be stressed that the purpose of the DESSA is not to categorize or label students but to identify their strengths and instructional needs so that families and teachers can work together to help students learn social-emotional skills that are essential to school and life.

Sample DESSA questions include:

- 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?

The purpose of the universal social-emotional screening is to identify each student's overall social-emotional development. -The DESSA assessment targets 8 key social-emotional skills. Once a student's social-emotional growth areas are identified, a plan to target and teach those skills will be developed and shared with families.

While the DESSA assessment approach is just one component of our social-emotional learning process, we want to make sure that you are informed of our use of this instructional tool. We believe that the information gathered from the assessments will be beneficial to your student's overall success both inside and outside of school. Please visit the Aperture-Connecticut Webpage [here](#). More information and resources will be coming soon.