



Mental Health Screening using the BESS

PARENT/GUARDIAN/CAREGIVER - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is universal mental health screening?

Universal social emotional and mental health screening provides a systematic, quick, and reliable way of assessing the behavioral and emotional strengths and potential risk levels in children and adolescents.

Denver Public Schools uses the BASC-3 Behavioral and Emotional Screening System (BASC-3 BESS or “BESS”) to complete universal mental health screening of all students.

The purpose of screening *all students* is to implement a proactive approach to meeting student needs. Data from the screening results are used to provide students with access to appropriate social emotional or mental health interventions. The results help guide decisions for type, duration, and level of these interventions and supports.

Just as students participate in screenings for vision, hearing, physical health, reading, and other academic areas, the BESS provides an indicator of a student’s mental health risk level. Screening allows for early identification of supports that can help offset current or future mental health risk in students.

Universal mental health and social emotional screening also helps school leaders identify trends across grades, classes, or groups of students. Schoolwide or grade-level practices can be shifted to better meet students’ needs in a meaningful way that is not fully dependent on a subjective or manual referral process.

The 2021 U.S. Department of Education's [Supporting Child and Student Social, Emotional, Behavioral, and Mental Health Needs](#) specifically recommended school districts “adopt a structured and comprehensive universal screening process to catch internalizing and externalizing child or student needs...three times per year” (p. 34). The U.S. Surgeon General has declared a [youth mental health crisis](#) and recommends educators “provide a continuum of supports to meet student mental health needs”. Universal mental health screening is a proactive and systematic way to determine appropriate supports for students.

In DPS, we have had access to the reliable BESS since 2016, and we have already laid a strong foundation for comprehensive universal mental health screening. DPS is more clearly defining and implementing this mental health screening process for the 2023-24 school year.

Why was the BESS selected as the universal screening tool?

The Behavior Assessment System for Children - Third Edition (BASC-3) is one of the most widely used behavioral, social, and emotional assessment tools, both in DPS, in other school districts, and in various non-school settings.

The BESS is the screening tool of the BASC-3, and the BASC-3 Flex is the progress monitoring tool that aligns with BESS results and is available for DPS mental health providers.

The BESS is quickly completed through an easy-to-access online platform. It is available in multiple languages, and it allows for multirater input (student, teacher, and parent/guardian perspective) which provides a comprehensive picture of a student’s social emotional and mental health functioning.

As DPS has used the BESS since 2016, it is familiar to many DPS students, families, and staff. DPS guidance documents, personnel support, and professional learning has been developed and allocated for screening administration and results analysis of the BESS.

How long will it take and how often do we screen students?

DPS has three BESS screening windows: one in the Fall, one in the Winter, and one in the Spring. Students will be screened during each screening window. Contact your student's school to learn the exact dates they will complete screenings.

One Student Self-Report can be completed in approximately 10-15 minutes. If completed whole-class (while on individual devices for privacy), it is estimated to take approximately 25-30 minutes. Teachers and parents/caregivers can complete their versions of the screening form in approximately 5 minutes per child.

How can I complete a parent/caregiver form of the BESS?

Parents/guardians/caregivers can access the BESS Parent Report Form [at this link](#). School teams may create shortened hyperlinks to support parent form completion. Parents/caregivers will need to have their **student's ID number and date of birth** to access the form.

As the guardian, can I review the questions prior to my student taking the screener?

Yes, parents/guardians can review the screener with school staff either over the phone or in person. A blank copy can **not** be sent home due to copyright restrictions.

If elevated risk is indicated from a BESS screening, is this a diagnosis?

No, the BESS is **not** considered a comprehensive diagnostic assessment. Rather, it is a tool that can be used to determine a child's risk level for developing emotional and/or behavioral challenges that may require intervention. When reviewing BESS results, school teams are expected to identify at least one school mental health professional, (a DPS school social worker, school psychologist, and/or school psychology intern) as a critical team member to support in interpretation of results and intervention/service identification. If a school is notified that a student has a disability or suspects that a child may have a disability, it is their Child Find Obligation to complete an evaluation under IDEA and/or Section 504.

Can I opt out my student from taking the BESS screener?

Yes. As a parent/guardian, you can opt your student out of participation in the Student Self-Report Form. This opt out can be completed through digital school enrollment packets and/or in Parent Portal. If you would like to rescind the opt-out and instead *would* like your child to complete the Student Self-Report form of the BESS, contact your child's school. You may also contact your child's school if you would like confirmation of opt-out.

What will happen if my student's BESS results indicate elevated risk?

A school team member will contact you to discuss screening results and possible next steps. Follow-up assessment measures may be indicated. Signed parent/guardian consent is required for assessment of a student's performance/functioning.

If a school team, with input from a DPS school social worker, school psychologist, or school psychology intern, has determined a social emotional or mental health intervention/service that would be appropriate for your child, they will share with you a Social Emotional/Mental Health (SEMH) Plan. The SEMH Plan will outline the type of service/intervention and the assessment or progress monitoring tools that will be used. Signed parent/guardian consent is required for an SEMH Plan to begin.

For each student without an IEP/Section 504 Plan who receives social emotional or mental health support and/or services on two or more separate occasions, the school social worker, school psychologist, and/or school psychology intern, will create and maintain an SEMH Plan outlining the nature of, rationale for, and expected duration of the intervention(s) the student is accessing.

If services are extended beyond six weeks without meeting criteria for discontinuing plan or if, any point, it is suspected by the school team that the student may have a disability under Section 504 (have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity), the practitioner listed on the SEMH Plan must closely consider whether the student's presenting concern(s) fall within the scope of Child Find obligations set forth by DPS policy JB-R-1.