

Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Program and Teaching Strategies GOLD (TSG) Alignment Paper

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The DECA Preschool Program and Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG) are used by programs nationwide to assess and promote the overall health and well-being of young children. While TSG supports child development across multiple domains, the DECA Program focuses specially on social and emotional development. The Devereux Center for Resilient Children created this alignment document in response to inquiries from early childhood professionals about how these tools are similar, different and can be used together.

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1. Program Overview and Philosophy

Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG)

Teaching Strategies GOLD is an authentic, ongoing observational system for assessing children from birth through kindergarten. It helps teachers to observe children in the context of every day experiences, which is an effective way to learn what they know and can do. *Teaching Strategies GOLD* is based on 38 objectives for development and learning that include predictors of school success and are based on school readiness standards. The objectives are aligned with the *Common Core State Standards*, state early learning guidelines, and the *Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework*. These objectives are at the heart of the system; teachers use them to focus their observations as they gather information to make classroom decisions. The 38 objectives at the heart of *Teaching Strategies GOLD* guide teachers through the assessment cycle, helping them to link observable behavior to essential early learning requirements and predict likely next steps in every area of development and learning. The objectives cover 10 areas of development and learning, including broad developmental areas, content areas, and English language acquisition. Many of the objectives also include dimensions that guide teachers' thinking about various aspects of a given objective and help clarify the behavior it addresses.

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Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Program

Based on resilience theory, the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Program is a strength-based assessment and planning system for children ages birth through five. Central to the DECA Program is the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA), a standardized measure of three within-child protective factors that serve as building blocks for social/emotional skill development, school readiness, and resilience. The DECA Program is a five-step system for collecting information, assessing children, summarizing and interpreting assessment results, planning for the class as a whole and individual children, and evaluating progress. Completion of the assessment, DECA, is just one part of getting to know the classroom and children. Also collected are classroom reflective checklists of quality for program elements including areas of focus like the environment, interactions, routines, activities and family partnership. Results from the classroom and child level are then linked to planning strategies that support the group of children as a whole and quality enhancement (Universal Interventions), as well as the child who may need more focused planning to help him/her build strengths (Targeted Interventions). In addition to serving as a useful planning tool to help make a difference in the lives of children, the DECA is a technically sound tool that helps programs measure outcomes. Essential to the DECA Program is a focus on adults including partnerships with families and building caregiver resilience.

2. How do the DECA (DECA) Program and the Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG) system align?

Teaching Strategies GOLD (TSG) and the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) are both high quality assessments of infants, toddlers and preschoolers. TSG helps adults assess 38 different developmental and learning objectives including areas including cognitive, literacy, mathematics and social-emotional. The DECA assessment helps adults to assess 3 key protective factors related exclusively to social-emotional health and resilience. The dimensions/scales for social-emotional health on both the DECA and TSG are quite similar. Both assessments explore social-emotional behaviors related to self-regulation, relationships and initiative. TSG and DECA both provide paper or web-based assessment options as well as strategies that lead to better planning and outcomes for children. TSG and DECA also provide useful reports and opportunities for advanced data analysis.

This document was created to support those early childhood professionals who may be using either Teaching Strategies Gold and/or the DECA Program and want a better understanding of how these resources can work together. Please feel free to contact the Devereux Center for Resilient Children at deca@devereux.org for questions related to this document. (April 2017)

3. Why would people choose to use both the DECA Program and TSG together?

Because both tools measure similar constructs related to social and emotional health, many people are curious if using both the DECA and TSG is necessary. After reviewing both systems and talking with several dual users across the country, we believe that people who are using both receive great benefits! For example:

1. The DECA Program provides a very direct path for observing, assessing, planning and evaluating progress for social-emotional health.
2. The DECA Program helps keep a laser focus on social-emotional development which is vital to classroom management, reducing challenging behavior and supporting school readiness.
3. The DECA Program uniquely keeps a strong focus on resilience by providing both universal supports for all children and targeted level tools and strategies that center around promoting resilience and preventing social-emotional concerns for specific children with identified needs.
4. The DECA Program is flexible and can meet the needs of a program choosing to use all or just some of the components of the program. Some programs will use the assessment and full program on all children while others may choose to use the DECA assessment and select strategies exclusively for children with more targeted/identified needs.
5. The DECA assessment can also be used as a stand-alone assessment tool used for information collection, referrals and eligibility. The DECA assessment serves as both an assessment of protective factors and a screener for social and emotional concerns. The DECA for preschoolers also contains a behavior concerns screener and a variety of tools and strategies focused specifically on behavior concerns.
6. The DECA Program offers a variety of tools to support partnerships with families around social and emotional health. The family resources are strength-based, easy to read and well received by parents.
7. The DECA Program helps to also focus on the well-being/resilience of the adults who care for children. Adults can access the free Devereux Adult Resilience Survey (DARS) online to support reflection on their own resilience.
8. In addition to the DECA Infant-Toddler Program and the DECA Preschool Program to support universal and targeted level interventions, Devereux also offers a complementary, expanded level assessment called the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment – Clinical (DECA-C) form that can be used by mental health and special education professionals for children with significant needs.

4. What do programs using both DECA and TSG have to say about their experience?

“Our program uses both Teaching Strategies Gold and DECA universally for all children. We use and value the data from both assessments. In our “Bring it Together” meetings with staff, we look for correlations between results and use that rich information to brainstorm the most effective strategies to support children’s social and emotional development. The DECA Classroom Profile provides a visual summary of the social and emotional strengths and needs of an entire classroom of children which is invaluable to the teachers’ planning process. The strength-based data prevents any inclinations to “blame” children for negative behaviors and puts the emphasis on skill-building. Some people might think that it is duplicative to do universal assessments on all children, but I truly feel that teachers need and benefit from the information from both tools. To me the assessments ask information about social and emotional health in a different way and teachers need as many tools in their bag of tricks to promote these critical life skills as possible. In addition, for those children who really do need additional supports, the DECA provides valuable information for the referral process.”

- Kelly Showers, Director
Juniata County Head Start/Early Head Start/Pre-K Counts, PA
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“We have been using TSG for several years. When we learned about DECA we were excited to see how they complimented each other. We were particularly excited about the Reflective Checklists and how they helped to bring together all the elements of social and emotional quality from all of the programs we are using (from CLASS to ECERS to Strengthening Families to TSG). The DECA Reflective Checklists serve as the glue that brings it all together. They also are the lens for our coaches to look through when trying to make a bridge to all the other tools. Reflective Checklists take big ideas and give them focus! The DECA assessment helps our teachers think about what children actually ‘need’ vs. just focusing on their behavior. TSG observations can really support the completion of the DECA assessment and helps to keep a focus on social and emotional practices. We believe our program needs both in order to keep social emotional health at the top of our priority list.”

- Program leader, AL
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“Our Head Start Program has been using Teaching Strategies Gold, Creative Curriculum and the Devereux Early Childhood (DECA) Program together for several years. Teaching Strategies Gold provides us with the assessment data that we need universally for all children in the program. For those children who display challenging behaviors or whose social and emotional skills need more individualized support, the DECA provides a deeper understanding of how we can most effectively plan and work to develop these critical skills. Furthermore, our program implements Conscious Discipline and the alignment between the DECA and Conscious Discipline strategies has really helped staff to use the DECA assessment data to inform their use of Conscious Discipline strategies. The reality is that teachers have so many responsibilities, so many competing priorities for their time and so many children to support--- DECA’s laser focus on the social and emotional skills that children need to be successful in Head Start and beyond provide a framework that teachers can understand and use within the context of their busy days. Our program staff have seen that the time invested in supporting children’s social and emotional development using DECA pays off for the child, the family and for the overall success of our program. “

- Stephani Millay, Child Development Team Manager, Audubon Area Head Start, KY

5. Is the assessment process the same?

Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG) and the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Program follow a VERY similar approach to assessment. As you can see below each program follows virtually the same steps. In many instances what is accomplished for one program does not need to be duplicated for the other, but can work for both assessments. This complementary process will reduce duplication and support both programs working together.

Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG)

Observe and Collect Facts

Teaching Strategies GOLD offers easy-to-use tools to help teachers focus their observations on children, document facts, and organize the information. Our brand-new Documentation app offers a fast, flexible, simple way to streamline the assessment process and capture and send documentation to *Teaching Strategies GOLD*. Optional tools like *Assessment Opportunity Cards™* and the *On-the-Spot Observation Recording Tool* help teachers streamline their documentation. Electronic portfolios offer a generous amount of storage, allowing teachers to upload, organize, and securely store photos, videos, and samples of children's work.

Summarize, Plan, and Communicate

Reports, the activity library, and weekly planning forms are just a few of the tools that help teachers summarize, plan, and share information with families, administrators, and other stakeholders. Teachers have everything they need to discuss each child's development and learning with others and to make informed decisions about the best ways to support each child's development.

Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA)

Step 1: Collect Information

When an early care and education provider can start to identify specific social emotional skills that may be underdeveloped in a child, he or she can conduct more focused protective factor observations to garner even more vital information to include in a plan to best help the child. The DECA Program provides two important and easy-to-use resources to gather more information on a child's use of social emotional skills and use of challenging behaviors entitled the Observation Form and the Behavior Incident Form. In addition the DECA Program provides a tool to collect information about teaching and caregiving practices that impact children. This tool is called the Reflective Checklist and allow adults to reflect on the social and emotional impact of the environment, interactions, daily routines, activities and partnerships with families. Reflective Checklist information can lead to social and emotional quality improvement strategies that are part of the DECA Program, improving quality support the resilience of all children.

Step 2: Administer the DECA Assessment

The DECA assessment is completed by teachers, caregiver and parents. The DECA can be administered on ALL children in a program to gain information on the social emotional health of each child in the class. DECA results can be used to inform lesson planning, individualized instruction, prevention efforts and strategies for children with identified needs. The DECA can also be administered on ONLY those children who are exhibiting social and emotional concerns (targeted). Targeted use of the DECA can support more advanced planning and strategies.

Analyze and Respond

Teaching Strategies GOLD provides teachers with the support they need to answer these questions: “What does this information mean?” and “What do I do next?” Teachers “tag” each piece of documentation with related objectives. Often, one rich piece of documentation can address many objectives and dimensions—there’s no need to enter a unique observation for every objective. When it comes time to evaluate children’s progress, the system will use these tagged objectives and dimensions to help teachers make informed decisions.

Evaluate

Teaching Strategies GOLD guides teachers through the crucial process of evaluating children’s knowledge, skills, and behaviors. Color-coded progressions of development and learning make it easy for teachers to compare each child’s knowledge, skills, and behaviors to widely held expectations for most children of the same age or class/grade. To make evaluations simpler and easier, all documentation that teachers tag with the objectives on the documentation screen are gathered on this screen as evidence to help teachers make their decisions.

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Step 3: Summarize the Assessment Results

Results are summarized for the overall assessment ranges of need, typical, and strength for each child. In addition, each item on the DECA is associated with a frequency rating. A child at-risk or in the needs range will benefit from teachers and parents looking more closely at his or her low frequency positive behaviors that can be directly inserted into a plan for that child. For example, a child who received a “rarely” on the DECA item “handles frustration well” would have a planning goal written as “Josiah will more frequently handle his frustration well.”

Step 4: Implement Plans and Strategies

The DECA Program *Classroom Strategies Guide* shows teachers how to make positive changes for the whole group and individual children based on the results of both their Reflective Checklist as well as the children’s individual DECA scores. For the at-risk or targeted child, assessment results are used as one source for protective factor and social emotional planning.

Step 5: Evaluate Progress

Many resources are provided to help document progress and capture both quantitative and qualitative information on a child’s journey to developing strong protective factors throughout his or her time in the program.