

**Assessment Name:**

**Behavioral and Emotional Screening System (BESS)**

**Validated Purpose of Assessment Method**

Screening	Diagnostic	Progress Monitoring
X		

**Overview:**

The *Behavior and Emotional Screening System* is an instrument designed to assist school personnel and other care providers determine the behavioral and emotional strengths and weaknesses of students between the ages of 3 and 18. This instrument is part of the *Behavior Assessment System for Children 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (Kamphaus & Reynolds, 2007). The measure consists of items relating to four dimensions of behavioral and emotional functioning including, *Adaptive Skills, Externalizing Problems, Internalizing Problems, and School Problems*. There are parent, teacher, and student forms available with each ranging from 25 to 30 items. Though it is possible to obtain student information on each dimension of the measure, a total score is typically used to identify those students with and at-risk for developing behavioral, emotional, and academic problems. The total score is computed by taking the sum of all responses though it is important to note that a raw total score can be difficult to interpret. As such, the scores are converted in to a standard score that allows the responses to be more readily compared to the broader population. Raters do not require formal training and there are methods of support to assist students and parents with reading needs.

**Brief review of validity and reliability evidence:**

There have been several studies examining the reliability and validity of the various BESS forms for students of varying ages. A majority of this research has been conducted on the teacher form with most of these student samples drawn from elementary or middle school. The research on the teacher form for elementary and middle school students has consistently found that the underlying dimensions of the measure can be reliably measured as indicated through estimates of each dimension's internal consistency. Internally consistent estimates have also been derived for the overall score generated through BESS ratings as well. Though test-retest estimates are less prevalent, those that have been reported in the literature suggest that the BESS produces stable scores over time for both the overall measure as well as each of the underlying dimensions (Distefano & Morgan, 2010). Similar findings have been reported for other populations and forms including teacher ratings of preschool students (Dowdy, Chin, & Quirk, 2013), teacher ratings of students with limited English language proficiency (Dowdy, Dever, Distefano, & Chin, 2011); elementary and middle school student self-ratings (Dowdy, Twyford, Chin, Distefano, Kamphaus, & Mays, 2011); and parent ratings of elementary school students (Dowdy, Kamphaus, Abdou, & Twyford, 2013). It is worth noting that though the research on these other forms and populations is encouraging, additional, targeted research is needed to strengthen the support for the use of the BESS with these other groups. However, the consistency and trends observed across the research on the BESS are notable.

The validity of the BESS has also been examined across these studies. Specifically, the scores generated from the measure have been compared with the scores from other measures of

student functioning. These other measures have included assessments of academic skills and other norm referenced measures. Results have consistently documented moderate associations between BESS scores and those from other measures. Scores from the externalizing behavior problems dimension tend to be more highly correlated with similar measures than those from the internalizing scale. As such, it appears that the scores drawn from the internalizing behavior problems might be evaluated with less consistency. It is worth mentioning that the total score typically used to assess the level of risk for students does seem to correlate well with measures of school, social, and behavioral functioning (Kamphaus & Reynolds, 2007; Renshaw et al., 2009).

### **Strength and Weakness:**

There are three primary strengths associated with the BESS. The first is that the scores produced by the instrument were normed on a nationally representative sample of students which allows comparisons to be drawn between specific students and the broader school-aged population. The second advantage is that the measure has been widely researched with results indicating that it is both reliable and valid for the intended purposes. The third advantage is that there are multiple underlying dimensions available for consideration which might provide insight into the type of intervention that is needed. The fourth advantage is that the BESS is already included in widely used data systems such as AimsWeb. The fifth advantage of the BESS is that it has accommodations such as *Spanish* language student and parent form and audio recordings available for students and parents with reading difficulties.

There are two potential weaknesses of the BESS. The first is that though there has been considerable research on the measure, there is a need for more on specific forms such as the parent and student versions. Moreover, there is a need for additional research on the BESS using independent, specifically defined populations such as students in preschool and high school or those with particular issues such as anxiety, depression, or conduct disorders. This information would provide further validation of the various forms for particular groups.

Relatedly, the second potential weakness is that users should consider the reliability and validity of the measure for their particular population. For instance, rather than relying on the norming sample, it might be worth examining more closely how the measure is working for a particular school or district. This would be especially true for districts that do not reflect the characteristics of the norming sample. These examinations might entail investigating how the measure is performing for its intended purpose and would require examining indices of reliability and validity on the particular group of students. It is worth noting that these practice-based evaluations apply to all standard, norm-referenced measures.

### **Administration Steps:**

The BESS forms are readily administered and do not require formal training. Because there are different forms for various respondents including teachers, parents, and students, there are some unique considerations for each form. However, all forms take approximately 3 – 5 minutes to complete for each student with responses being provided on a Likert scale ranging between “*Never*” and “*Always*.” Each form also includes negatively worded items to increase The administration procedures and other considerations for each form are described below.

*Teacher Form.* It is important to note that teacher forms should only be completed for those students with whom the teacher has had enough time to get to know. Most standard rating scales suggest a contact period of approximately 6 weeks so that the teacher has sufficient time to become familiar with the student and their behavioral tendencies. The teacher form is typically used to evaluate all students in a class and takes approximately 60 minutes to complete for a standard sized classroom. Though it is possible for teachers to complete the form in a single sitting, the developers recommend that teachers complete the measure across multiple sittings to ensure accuracy of responses.

*Student Form.* The student form is available for those in grades three to twelve. The student form is most often completed in a whole class context in which all students are concurrently providing responses to the items. The total time for administration to a whole class is typically 15 minutes. The student form has a *Spanish* language version available. Moreover, there are accommodations available for students and parents with reading difficulties such as the provision of an audio recording for each item to assist with completion.

*Parent Form.* The BESS also has a parent version available. The parent version is structured similarly to the other forms and provides assessments of student behavior on the previously cited dimensions. The parent can be typically completed in 5 minutes. Both a *Spanish* language version and audio recording of items are available as possible accommodations.

#### **Materials:**

The only materials required to complete the BESS forms are the appropriate form (i.e., teacher, parent, student) and writing utensil to complete the form. It is also possible for the measure to be completed through an online system.

#### **Data coding/sorting/presenting process:**

The ratings for each student are summed and then used to compute a standard score. The standard scores typically represented as a *T* Score with estimates of 60 or below indicating that students meet or exceed basic expectations and are at normal risk levels; estimates of between 61 and 70 indicating that the student is at elevated risk and might benefit from a secondary intervention related to their needs; and estimates of 71 or higher indicating extremely elevated risk levels and that a behavioral specialist might be required to develop individualized support plans. The BESS also produced percentile rank scores that represent the student's functioning compared to the normed sample. For instance, a percentile score of 90% would indicate that the student's score is as high or higher than 90% of the students in the normed sample group.

#### **References**

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